Skyfall

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Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham's Father, Abigail Hobbs, Jack Crawford, Nurse Mathilde (OC), Dr. Eleanor Maurin (OC), Josh (OC)
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Skyfall

by GracefulFalcon

Summary

Sequel to Kissing the Knife by TheCosmicPebble. That work is not required to understand this one, but there are a few things that I reference, so I recommend reading it. They're a very talented writer so you should check it out!

Will and Hannibal have escaped to Italy after the events in Hannibal's kitchen. After all they have been through, it is difficult to start a relationship from the ground up. Hannibal does not trust Will to stay, and Will does not trust himself not to lose himself in his newfound darkness.

A Bed Carved from a Sturdy Oak

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Almost a month has passed since that fateful night in Hannibal's kitchen. Will had never been out of the states until now, a wanted fugitive no less. He had wanted to go to a country with no extradition laws, but Hannibal argued for Italy, claiming that the larger population of tourists would help them blend in and that they would be less likely to run into trouble with intolerant neighbors. Not to mention that Hannibal was already fluent in Italian, and it would be on the easier side for Will to pick up quickly. If he was being honest, Will was very skeptical that this would work. He just about rioted when Hannibal told him that they would be flying, but Hannibal mollified him that arriving in a boat would attract much more unnecessary attention and that everyone at airports was running on an average of two hours of sleep and too much cheap coffee. The getaway had gone off without a hitch, and he was beginning to see how no one had ever suspected Hannibal until Will came along and threw the established order upside down. There was a practiced elegance to how easily Hannibal slipped into Henrik Janson's slightly skittish demeanor and fragile posture. He explained that it was a common enough Latvian name to not be remarkable, but foreign enough to explain his accent. Most westerners could never tell apart Eastern European names anyway, he smirked, an unreadable expression flickering behind his eyes. Will went with Peter Hill. It was common, but not obviously fake. Peter was a good man, Will thought, or at the very least a lot better than him. Peter was a carpenter, simple, but skilled. Direct, but polite. He enjoyed the quiet life of the small city they settled in, catching fish and strolling around the bustling streets in his free time.

Will was not simple, in fact, he was the antithesis of simple. His life up until now may not have been easy, but it was straightforward. . .for the most part, at least. Settling into his new life was not an issue. Will never belonged anywhere and he had to pretend even when wearing his own face, so there was no difference now. Settling into his new life–with Hannibal–was the issue. The older man seems so assured, so comfortable, not only in his new identity, but in his feelings for Will. Will knows he loves Hannibal, oh how he loves him, but it is more complicated than that. He has no doubt of Hannibal's feelings, that much is certain, but the thought of the person he had become in order to be loved by someone like Hannibal shakes him to the very core. Maybe this is why he has not continued to explore the new aspect of his and Hannibal's relationship. Is that what it is? A relationship? By all accounts, they are in a domestic relationship. They live in the same home, share the same bed, resolve any outside issues together, but something is stopping Will, as if a lump wedged itself inside his vocal chords, rendering him speechless.

As the days melt together, Will falls into a routine. He wakes up early, skips breakfast, and goes out to the workshop in the basement to work on his commissions. He doesn't need to work, but he welcomes the stability of it. Making furniture was always a hobby that he rarely had time for, but he could never hold a regular job with background checks and fingerprinting anymore, so the opportunity was perfect. Woodwork and carpentering are the kind of work where Will doesn't need to think, leaving his body to go through the motions as he walks

through the halls of his mind. There is so much time to ponder over things, to scrutinize every detail of his and Hannibal's past. Will usually is not in the house during the day, but he knows Hannibal does not leave. He had actually asked Hannibal about the issue of finances, but had been dismissed with a flick of the hand and a curt statement about everything being taken care of. Back in Baltimore, Will was aware that Hannibal was well off, but he could not have imagined the scope of it until they were on the run. He is sure he doesn't even know the half of it because Hannibal tends to be private about it, and Will never cares to pry. That being said, he has no definitive idea of what the older man spends the mornings doing. Leather-bound drawing notebooks begin to slowly multiply on nightstands, and tantalizing smells emanate from the kitchen. There is always something new awaiting him in the kitchen. The dishes are a bit simpler, but that most likely has to do with the limitations of their local market, not Hannibal himself. Will never asks what is in the dishes, not that he cares that much, but something tells him it is actually beef, chicken, and pork this time around. Hannibal is acting blasé about the obvious lack of hunting, but Will can tell he can spring at any moment, like a cat sitting on its haunches.

Having eaten in companionable silence, they both usually get up to do the dishes. Even without Hannibal's affinity for scents, Will can appreciate the smell of the soap. The slight zest of citrus adds a bit of life to the earthy rosemary and clove, a perfect combination for washing up. This is where they go their separate ways again, Will leaving to deliver his commissions and Hannibal making his way to the spare room with the grand piano. Will wishes they could have a harpsichord, but he wants to avoid the risk of purchasing anything remotely related to Hannibal that the FBI might catch wind of. The idea of losing Hannibal after everything is unthinkable. He would not hesitate to kill anyone that hurt Hannibal in any way, and it terrifies him. The high he felt killing Abigail, the power and utter control he felt, over not only others but himself was too perfect. He is wary of what it would mean to kill more people. The actual act does not frighten him, it is the fact that he is not afraid of himself and what he has become that actually frightens him. Will does not want to lose control, keeping a grip on himself ever since he accidentally snapped the neck of his neighbor's dog so many years ago. His father beat him for it, and it took every ounce of willpower not to fight back. That is why Will can't face Hannibal, why he goes out in the late evenings and lays on the field by their house, waiting until the lights go off and Hannibal is asleep. He knows that this cannot go on forever. He hates himself for ignoring Hannibal the way he does, but Will is terrible and selfish, so he avoids the issue, buying time that was never his to begin with.

Another day comes and goes, and Will is getting ready to sleep. He loves this bed, having made it himself from a sturdy oak. He knows Hannibal likes it too because he often catches the other man running his fingers across the headboard reverently, as if the proximity to an object Will made is enough in itself. Hannibal is already lying down, under the covers, and Will slides in beside him after turning the light off. They are not exactly touching, but the physical proximity is present, which only adds to the tension that has been building the entire evening. Will knows Hannibal is a patient man, but even that patience has its limits. Anxiety rises within Will's chest like boiling water in a pot far too small. He steels himself, tipping his head slightly.

"Hannibal," he whispers. Hannibal does not say a word, but he fixes his eyes on Will's, a strand of hair falling onto his forehead. They gleam in the moonlight pouring in the window,

tiny flecks of red barely visible in the monochrome of night. When it becomes obvious Will is not going to say anything, Hannibal breathes shakily and opens his mouth, but the words are not what Will was expecting.

"It's ok, Will. You can say it." He averts his eyes, turning back to look at the ceiling.

"Say. . .what?" queries Will. He was sure of what Hannibal wanted to say, but he begins second guessing himself. Another silence passes. It probably lasts a few seconds, but it is an eternity of limbo for Will, stretching the seconds how a black hole stretches light.

"You can go, I will not prevent you. Two weeks ago, possibly even the previous week, I would have done everything in my power to keep you with me, but now. . ."Hannibal pauses for a breath and Will is about to say something when Hannibal continues. "Now, I would let you go. If being with me is so painful for you that you cannot bear my presence, I would let you go. I want you to be free," his voice breaking on the last word. Will is stunned. This is not where he predicted the conversation to go, so he is caught completely unawares. He was expecting blood, anger, retribution, but not this. Violence he could have dealt with, but the sheer sadness in Hannibal's tone is worse than the blade of a knife in his stomach.

"No, Hannibal, that's not. . .I never. . .I don't," he chokes out before Hannibal cuts him off again, almost irritated this time.

"You don't have to lie to me, Will. I see the way you gaze longingly at the sea whenever you go fishing. I see how you stare off into the distance. You miss home. You miss your old life. And I see how you look at me, or more accurately, you don't look at me. You avert your eyes from mine when I enter the room. You barely speak to me. You come to bed often after I am asleep. I hope you do not think so lowly of me that you thought I would not notice." Hannibal finally turns back to look at Will, his eyes dark and shining.

"It's alright, Will. I forgive you. I have always forgiven you, and I always will."

"No, Hannibal, that's not what I was going to say at all," his brow furrows as he brings his hand up to push the curls out of his face. "You make it look so easy, like a skin you can slither in and out of, but for me it's different. I killed Abigail, I slit her throat right in front of you, and you are okay with it. You see me, the real me, and you don't turn away. I could lose myself in it and never come back. It horrifies me in a way I can't explain. Being loved by you, seeing me for who I am is. . .foreign." He shakes his head.

"Bedelia called it a person suit, and I have never taken mine off since I knew to put it on, which is why I was never close to anyone. Beverly was the closest I ever had to a friend, other than you. I've always flinched at the prospect of physical intimacy with someone, let alone desired it. And I don't even mean sex, just being held and cherished. And I want it with you, Hannibal, but I don't know where to start. You look at me like I'm the entire world and I don't know what to do with it, with how it makes me feel," Will sighs. He turns to find tears brimming in Hannibal's eyes.

"It's new for me, too, Will." Will's eyes follow a single tear as it traces a path down Hannibal's cheek. "After Mischa died, I never loved anyone again. I thought her death had ripped away that part of me, and I was content with it. If she could take a piece of me with

her, I would give it willingly. I would give her anything." Hannibal pauses to lick his lips. "I'm not accustomed to the feelings I possess now, to loving another person in a way that is so. . .consuming. I have 'dated' other people in the past, Alana is an example of that, but I never felt a depth of emotion for them. Many of them were good people, but they were placeholders, useful tools to achieve a higher goal," he sighs, contemplatively. "Not until I met you. The flood of emotion was almost too much to bear. I felt razed by it, as if a blind man had turned to the sun and regained his sight. I believe that is why I never saw what you were giving me, I could not believe it, it was so surreal. Unimaginable. I have done nothing in my life to deserve you or your love, which is why I felt as if it had to have an expiration date. What I have with you is so bright and beautiful that surely the universe herself would see it and snuff it out."

"When the blind lead the blind, they both end up in a pit," Will muses.

"In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed are kings," Hannibal retorts, smiling slightly at the light banter.

"I don't want to leave you, Hannibal," Will whispers, "I don't think I ever could without leaving some of myself behind. I've traced the line of your chest and split it open, carving out a hollow for my heart alongside yours. I might as well finish the job and live there myself. Would you let me?"

"Always." The response resonates, echoing like a pledge with only the moon as witness.

The moon moves across the sky, elongating barely defined shadows. Will stands in Hannibal's kitchen once again, righteous, drenched in blood, but it is not Abigail's corpse that stares emptily back at him. It is Hannibal's. The man's expression is serene in death, a complete contradiction of the mangled skin around his neck slowly spouting blood. Will comes back to himself and feels the handle of a knife in his right hand, slick with the same blood. With Hannibal's blood. Hannibal's blood.

"No! Hannibal, no!" he screeches as he falls to his knees beside the dead man, the echo of Hannibal's name tearing from his lips. He searches for something, anything, to stop the tide erupting from the wound, but he knows it is too late. It does not take a medical doctor to know that the wound is too deep. A sense of helplessness overtakes Will, and he is about to keel over when a pair of hands interrupts him, pulling him back and up to his feet. He turns to find himself staring into the cold, seething eyes of Jack Crawford.

"You killed him," Jack accuses. "You're a killer, just like him." His grip on Will tightens, and Will finds himself fighting back.

“No.” His fists connect with Jack's face. “No.” His neck. “No.” In a fit of desperation, he tries to free himself from the taller man's iron grip. The blows do absolutely nothing, so he increases the ferocity of his attack, practically clawing at his adversary.

"Will," comes Jack's voice again, but there is something off about it. It is accented, more gravely. "Come back to me, Will."
Will wakes with a start, noticing that the hands holding on to him are actually Hannibal's and not Jack's. He blinks, chasing the sleep from his eyes and focusing on the man in front of him. He immediately notices the bruises dotting Hannibal's face and neck and turns his head away.

"I. . ." he begins, but Hannibal cuts him off, gingerly letting him go now that he has stopped thrashing.

"You were having a nightmare," he explains, as if unaware of the purple splotches coloring his face. "You are alright now, no one is going to hurt you." He extends his arm slowly, similarly to how one would if he were placating a wounded animal, but Will jerks away from the touch. Hannibal's face falls momentarily, and Will can see the shadow that comes across his face as he forces it into a neutral expression, bringing his walls up to disassociate from the rejection.

"In your dream, was I. . ." he trails off. "Was I hurting you? You were screaming my name and saying no." He leaves the part when Will attacked him unsaid because it isn't like he needs to point it out, the evidence is glaring back at Will like a brand.

"No, Hannibal, you don't understand." Will shakes his head. "It was me. I. . . I killed you." The tears welling in his eyes begin to fall. "I slit your throat." He clasps his hands together to stop them from shaking. "I took the knife in my hand and took the life from your eyes, and I did not even realize what I was doing until it was too late." Hanging his head in shame, Will begins to shake, unable to look the other man in the eyes.

"Is that what this is about? You are wary of losing yourself to the extent that you would harm me?" replies Hannibal carefully. His voice is low, strained, as if the words are scratching his throat on the way out.

"I already did," chokes Will.

He finally meets Hannibal's gaze, struck by the gentle expression on his face. His hand lifts to Hannibal's face, almost of its own accord, to gently trace over the fresh bruises that have begun to darken over the course of their conversation. Hannibal shivers slightly at the touch, arching into the warmth of Will's fingertips against his skin. When Will moves to pull his hand away, Hannibal quickly catches it within his own and presses it back to his cheek, lightly stroking over Will's knuckles.

"I am not afraid of you," murmurs Hannibal. "I may be caught off guard by your actions, but that is more a testimony of my inability to entirely predict you than anything else. You do not frighten me." Hannibal then takes the hand gripped within his own and presses it to his heart. "Will, if I were to die of anything but natural causes, I would want it to be by your hand."

Will gazes back at Hannibal with absolute wonder and disbelief. This was the same man that framed him for murder and let his brain boil within his skull for months just to see what would happen, and now here he is, laying himself bare before Will. They were past the deceit

now. Once the encephalitis had cleared, he was able to see Hannibal for what he was, and he would not let Hannibal hurt him ever again. That was when it dawned on him.

"You won't let me hurt you. That's why you aren't afraid," he ponders.

"On the contrary, my dear Will, I would let you hurt me a thousand times over. If my suffering would be what you truly wanted, I do not think I could deny you. I would only ask that you didn't." The slight smile that was spreading across Will's face fades as Hannibal's words hit him like icy daggers. The vulnerability Hannibal is showing him is almost too much to bear.

"Hannibal," Will breathes, struggling to find the right words, "Even if I wanted to, I don't think that I could." He opens his palm to lay flat across Hannibal's chest, feeling the steady heartbeat beneath.

"You and I both know you are capable of more than you give yourself credit for," retorts Hannibal, "but I am relieved to hear that you do not wish me harm. I really was worried, Will, that you had changed your mind. Your ability to arrange yourself into different shapes to fit each given moment is one of the things I love most about you." His eyes flicker slightly, as if considering something internally. "I am often curious how you will manage to defy my expectations yet again," he admits.

Will is overcome with the sudden urge to touch him somehow, more than how he already has. The nervous tension from earlier has dissipated entirely, but he still feels a strange uncertainty about what he can ask of Hannibal, which is ludicrous because they have been through so much together.

“Can I hold you? Would you let me?" At that, Hannibal smiles softly, and leans forward to rest his head on Will's shoulder, nuzzling into his neck. Will is trembling, overcome with the proximity he denied himself for so long, and wraps one arm around Hannibal's shoulders, holding him tightly as if the moment would be ripped away from him if he didn't. His other hand finds its way up to Hannibal's hair, gently stroking the silvery-blond strands. Will leans back, causing both of them to fall onto the pillows. Hannibal closes his eyes and sighs contentedly in the arms of his beloved. The moment is so perfect, Will wishes he could live in it forever, without the need to watch their backs everywhere they go, just them and this moment, together. He feels Hannibal's breathing even out, and he is certain the older man has drifted off to sleep when Hannibal whispers so quietly that Will has to strain to hear him.

"You are thinking about something." The tone is not accusatory, simply an observation. "You can tell me. Please." The 'please' is said with such reverence that Will's heart aches.

"I'm thinking about all the time I wasted silently loving you in the dark, denying not only myself, but you in the process," reflects Will, nuzzling into Hannibal's hair to press a kiss on his temple. "I could never have imagined having you like this, much less that you would let me," he admits a bit wryly. Although he cannot see it, Will can tell that Hannibal is smiling. They fall asleep like that, entangled in each other's arms.

Chapter End Notes

This is my first time writing anything this long with any discernible plot (plot is still practically nonexistent, but there is a thing I'm building up to), so I'm curious to see where it goes. There may or may not be references to other literary works since phrases often stick with me without me noticing. I hope you all enjoy!

Sandwiches Are a Breakfast Food

Chapter Notes

TW: Descriptions of graphic violence, child abuse

Hannibal talks about his life in Lithuania a bit, which includes mentions of WW2, the USSR, Nazis, etc. If this is a trigger for you, please consider skipping the second half of this chapter. I can summarize in the comments if anyone would like.

I do want to preface this by saying that I am not Lithuanian, but I really wanted to include Hannibal's childhood culture a little bit more as it's not a topic I've seen touched on very much. I tried to be as authentic as possible, so if there's anything I got incorrect, please let me know.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The sun rises steadily and paints their faces in a golden glow, breathing life back into the sleep-laden bodies. Will blinks the night away from his eyes, suddenly becoming aware of the man still enveloped in his arms. The awareness of last night's confessions comes crashing onto him like a tidal wave, but Hannibal's deep inhales steady him. For their entire stay here, Will always woke up to an empty bed in the mornings, so to find Hannibal still here is shocking at the least. He lifts his head up slightly to marvel at the older man, so serene in sleep, every trace of the shadow of violence completely missing. Leaning forward more to press his face to the crown of Hannibal's head, Will reminisces on how this is his life now, so simple, carefree. A twinge of anxiety passes through him as he thinks how nothing can ever be that easy, not for them, but then Hannibal's eyes slowly open, and he smiles to find Will still wrapped around him.

"Good morning, Will," breathes Hannibal creakily, his voice stiff as a result of having woken from a deep sleep.

"Morning," murmurs Will into Hannibal's hair. The scent of fresh pine, musk, and something that is distinctly Hannibal floods his nostrils. This is what home smells like.

"I must say, I half expected to wake up alone, having completely imagined the events of the prior evening," he pauses, features arranging themselves into their usual unreadable formation, "Would you like some breakfast? You normally opt to forgo any meals in the morning."

"I'm not the biggest fan of breakfast food. Eggs are overrated if you ask me," replies Will, distractedly carding his fingers through Hannibal's hair. He ponders for a moment, hesitant to speak again. It's embarrassing to admit it, but Hannibal knows many much more damning things about him, so he soldiers on. "I'm also just not used to it," he concedes, "I didn't

always get to eat it as a kid and the habit stuck." At this Hannibal pulls away to rest on his forearms, turning his head to look at Will properly. There is no pity in his eyes, only a hint of what feels like understanding. Will cannot imagine Hannibal ever not having enough to eat, and he frowns slightly, but Hannibal speaks before he can open his mouth.

"I can make you something else then if you would like," he smiles softly. The expression surprises Will. Hannibal never used to smile this much. The expression feels foreign, unnatural, but the way Hannibal's face lights up and his eyes twinkle makes Will want to make him smile for the rest of his life. "We often had sandwiches for breakfast, in Lithuania," he amends.

"Ok, that would be nice," Will caves. Sandwiches were always a weak spot for him. He watches as Hannibal slides off of the bed, almost cat-like in grace and dexterity, and holds out a hand. Will does not have time to consider it before he feels himself take Hannibal's hand in his, be pulled up out of the bed, and led down the hallway to the kitchen.

Their kitchen is nowhere near as fancy as Hannibal's kitchen in Baltimore, but the appliances are new and reliable, and there is enough space for two people. Will never spends a significant amount of time in the kitchen, but he understands why Hannibal likes it so much. The tiles feel cool under his bare feet, grounding him into the space. After being burnt to a crisp from the inside by his encephalitis, Will appreciates the cold more than he ever had. Although neither of them has spoken, the room feels alive with a gentle hum emanating from every corner of it, as if the kitchen is breathing along with them. The windows look out into their yard, if it can even be called that. Hannibal's house in rural Italy has 13 acres of property with an orchard of fruit trees: apples, oranges, lemons, even olives litter the area close to the house. Will wonders if the trees were why Hannibal picked the property in the first place. The house itself lacks what Will understood of Hannibal's style, but the orchard casts a form of protection from peering eyes. Anyone trying to look into the house from the back would have to come close enough to be easily spotted.

"Will." The sound of Hannibal's voice jolts him from his thoughts, and it's as if he is wading through fog. Coming back to his senses, he realizes that he is clutching Hannibal's hand very tightly.

"Oh, sorry," he mumbles, letting go quickly.

"You have nothing to apologize for, Will. I enjoy any proximity to you, but I thought we were here so I could make you breakfast," the older man chuckles. He moves away from Will, who is struck by the absence of Hannibal's warmth. Will does not say anything, but Hannibal does not seem to mind. It is one of the reasons Will always felt safe with Hannibal, even when he was messing with his head during their sessions, no obligation to obey the laws of appropriate societal behavior. After all, it is hardly like Hannibal obeyed them either.

Will watches as Hannibal moves around the kitchen, pulling out fresh rolls he baked the day before, various types of cheeses, prosciutto, ham, salami, and pickles. He is entirely in his element, moving around with a graceful purpose. He plates the sandwiches and hands one to Will. It is open-faced, which Will realizes with surprise that he has never had before.

"Are open-faced sandwiches supposed to be more fancy?" Will queries, a teasing tone on his lips.

"No, actually," Hannibal answers. "That is just how I ate them." Will does not fail to pick up on the past tense. Ate, not eat.

"You don't anymore?" He asks, curiosity getting the best of him.

"I have not had sandwiches like these for breakfast since I was a child." A distant look passes over Hannibal's eyes, and Will remembers the look of understanding he saw on his face this morning. Memories of conversations in the office, recollections of a dead sister surface within Will's mind.

"What happened to you, Hannibal? In Lithuania. You never talk about it. This is the most I have heard you mention your home country since I've met you," Will pries, knowing full well that he's wading into dangerous territory, but he has fished before and the strength of the current does not deter him. Hannibal looks at Will with an expression of longing, as if he wants to speak, but he does not. "You wanted me to see you, so now let me. Let me see you, Hannibal."

Hannibal stands there, like an iron stake in the ground, unyielding. Will stands still as well. Good fishermen have to be patient. Fish don't always want to bite, but Will knows that Hannibal wants to, that he needs to, it is only that he is afraid. So Will will wait, as long as he needs to, until the need overpowers any self-preservation instincts. Hannibal appears to be wrestling with himself, wanting to speak, but there is something preventing him from forming the words.

A while passes, and Will begins to think that Hannibal is not going to say or do anything at all when he reaches out and places both of his hands on Will's shoulders, as if steadying himself. He bows his head, and Will is almost certain the other man is going to collapse, but instead he looks Will directly in his eyes, staring into the very core of him. The usual mask of indifference is gone. Will does not need his empathy to feel the gut-wrenching pain that is so clearly written on Hannibal's face. He tries to move, to do something, but Hannibal holds him in place, burning him with the intensity of the moment. It hurts. Will is in physical pain, his body tearing at its seams from the inside, drowning in the sorrow. The pressure of a thousand rivers pounds down on him. Is this what Hannibal carries with him everyday, locked away in a corner of his mind? He can barely bear it, knees buckling with the weight of it all. Hannibal breaks their eye contact first, letting go of his grip on Will's shoulders and smoothing out his shirt.

"Tea? Or coffee?" He says absently, all traces of emotion gone from his face as he begins walking toward the pantry to grab cups and other miscellaneous articles.

"Coffee would be fine," Will blinks in disbelief. The echo of the encounter still chills him to the core. Hannibal quickly finishes making the coffee, hands Will a cup, and leaves with his sandwiches untouched. Will stands there until he is sure Hannibal is not coming back, deciding to eat the sandwiches because it would be a waste otherwise. He has lost his appetite, and they taste bland on his tongue even though he knows that any other time they would taste great. He finishes up his coffee along with the dishes. Not knowing where

Hannibal has actually gone off to, Will decides to get dressed first. He has not changed his style all that much, mainly sticking with his collection of Henley shirts, button downs, and flannels. He haphazardly picks a blue button down, realizing belatedly that this is one Hannibal bought for him. It is much nicer than most of the shirts he owned in the past, not only in cut and fit, but the fabric does not irritate his often over-sensitized skin like such shirts so often do. He stops by at his workshop next, hesitates momentarily, then crouches down to the lowest shelf and pulls out an ornate box from behind the stacks of newspapers. Tucking it under his arm, he leaves the workshop, locking the door behind him. He is ahead of schedule on his projects, so taking a day off is not going to be an issue.

It is then that Will realizes he does not actually know where Hannibal is. He checks their bedroom, the living room, the room that has become Hannibal's "office", and even the attic. Not a trace of Hannibal in sight. The only place left to look is outside, which is easier said than done considering the thirteen acres of property. Something spurs Will on, guiding his feet. It is a fleeting feeling more than anything, but it gives him purpose and he finds himself walking to the largest oak that he knows stands in the corner of their property. The late autumn air is cold, but Will does not mind it. The wind kisses his cheeks, leaving patches of pink along his milky skin. Getting a tan has not been anywhere on his list of priorities and with winter a hop, skip, and jump away, he is unlikely to be graced with enough sunlight anyway. The fallen leaves crunch under his boots, painting the ground in a sea of reds, oranges, and golds. The wind lifts a few of the smaller leaves up off of the ground, creating its own design out of the landscape. Almost all the trees here will lose their leaves come winter, leaving barren branches behind to congregate beneath the sky in the frigid air, reaching for the heavens.

Will hears Hannibal before he sees him. The timbre of the voice is unmistakably his, but the language is not one Will has heard before. The "r" sounds roll together, and the vowels stretch, carrying a certain depth to them. The words meld together, like raindrops mixing on a windowpane. He stops in his tracks when he realizes that he cannot separate the words because Hannibal is singing. For all the music Hannibal engaged in over the years, Will has never heard him sing. His voice is not trained, but the song sounds like one meant for anyone. Nevertheless, the slight trembling of Hannibal's voice mixed with his usual gravelly tone gives a vehement quality to the melody. Will begins inching closer to the ancient oak he now is sure Hannibal is sitting under. He finds Hannibal on the ground, arms clutched to himself, legs tucked up to his chest, and his head tipped up, resting on the trunk of the tree. His eyes are closed, evidence of tears glistening on his face. If the older man has noticed Will's approach, he gives no acknowledgment. Will sets the box down a few feet away, and sits by Hannibal's side. The other man lets out a final string of words, finishing the song. Will notices that he is shivering, dressed only in a light shirt.

"Aren't you cold," he asks, brow furrowing.

"I've been much colder," Hannibal replies, his voice distant, as if Will is speaking to him through a cloud.

"And here I was thinking I was the only one with self-destructive tendencies," Will chuckles, realizing that he isn't being entirely appropriate for the situation, but the corners of Hannibal's mouth tick up. Will takes his jacket off and wraps it around Hannibal. The man is leaning

against a tree, so he just drapes it over his chest like a blanket. Clearly unperturbed by unconventional jacket use, Hannibal shifts slightly, tugging the jacket closer to himself. Will watches as he breathes in deeply, faltering momentarily. A fleeting expression flickers across his face and is quickly dismissed. Hannibal leans his head on Will's shoulder, and Will presses the side of his head to Hannibal's, returning the pressure.

"I truly do not know what I have done to deserve you," Hannibal murmurs. They sit in companionable silence for a few minutes, watching the leaves fall softly onto the ground, the vapor from their breaths barely visible in the air.

"What were you singing? It sounded beautiful, but also very sad," prods Will, hoping that the question is not a mistake. Hannibal seems surprised at the question, and takes a moment to consider an answer.

"It is an old folk song. A young man is telling his rosemary plant about how he is in love, but his beloved does not reciprocate his feelings. Claiming that there is nothing left for him in this world, he enlists in the army. He tells the plant about all of the things he is given: a chestnut horse, a sharp saber, a bag with lapels, black shoes with spurs, a canteen with alcohol, all so that he will not think about his love. It is only when he rushes from the trenches to the bayonets when he realizes what he is fighting for. The last stanza of the song is 'for the bitter Earth bathed in our blood, for our enslavement, for our shackles, for all our spilled tears'. It is a marching hymn, but it was not uncommon for children to learn it." He shifts slightly, head still resting on the younger man's shoulder, his hand searching for Will's. Will intertwines their fingers and gives an encouraging squeeze, urging Hannibal to continue. "I barely speak my native language aloud anymore. I stopped entirely for a time when I moved away from Lithuania, trying to drop the Eastern European accent that Westerners often look down upon. No need to advertise my idiosyncrasy more than necessary, but the accent never truly left me. Ever since I moved here, there has not been an opportunity to use it. Nevertheless, the language still breathes within me in my thoughts, my dreams."

"I know that your sister died, but you also said you were an orphan," ventures Will, "If it wouldn't be too much, too painful for you, I would like you to tell me what happened. I want to know." Hannibal considers this for a moment, then makes up his mind.

"Alright, Will. If you really wish to know." His demeanor changes, as if he has just realized something. "Are you not cold, Will? You did lend me your jacket after all," he says, a hint of protectiveness creeping into his tone.

"No, I tend to run hot, remember?" Will teases, the barb not meant to actually carry any animosity. Hannibal is not bothered by it, as Will had expected. He leans into Hannibal's warmth a bit, more for Hannibal's sake than his own.

"When I was a child, Lithuania was the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, still under the iron fist of the USSR decades after the war. You probably are aware of the 1980s of the west, but that time was incendiary for the states in the Eastern Bloc. The Poles, our next door neighbors, were fighting a war of their own at the time. We did not declare independence until 1990, but the spirit was there. Many groups began rising up, among them were extremists. A man named Vladis Grutas was the leader of a Nazi group." As he says the name, Hannibal's lips curl in disgust.

"Due to the strict laws forced by the Soviet Union, my parents could not keep guards, so they broke into our home." Will's stomach curdles with a feeling of intense dread at what he is certain will happen next. Hannibal extracts his head from Will's shoulder and sits up straight, gazing off into the distance, utter fury displayed on his face like a mask.

"To this day, I do not know why," he whispers. "They took Mischa and I, chained us to the stove in the cellar, and they slit my parents' throats in front of us. There was a lot of blood, more than I had seen before at the time, but the worst were Mischa's sobs. She cried for me, screaming, but they would not allow me to go to her. She cried herself to sleep as every day passed, and I could not tell if she trembled from fear or from the cold. It was the coldest winter yet, the coldest winter of my life." Hannibal scoffs, angling his eyes down. Will listens intently, using every shred of self control he has not to let Hannibal see the tears falling from his eyes.

"I used to pray to God that Mischa would stop crying one day, that she could be happy again. I guess I should have clarified what I wished for because one day she did stop crying. She also stopped breathing." Will knew full well that this part of the story was coming, but the unfairness of it all made him angry beyond belief. He kept quiet, giving Hannibal the opportunity to continue.

"They took her away then. I could not have her, even in death. Her fate did something to me. They were not expecting me to resist after all those months with barely anything to eat, so they allowed themselves to become careless. I memorized the guard rotations, took note of the men who were there for material gain, not because they liked it, the men who avoided the gore of it if they could. My opportunity presented itself when one of the younger ones came to give me their leftovers. I grabbed the chains and pounced on him, choking him with them. I told him that I just wanted him to undo the shackles, that I would let him go and stay there if he did it. I managed to convince him as he wanted to believe it, I was only a child after all. The second my limbs were free, I pounced on him again, taking the knife from his belt and slitting his throat open. The blood gushed out, drenching me in it. I could barely breathe. I took the rest of his weapons and food, some knives and dried sausage, and waited until I knew the coast was clear. I ran, leaving everything I had ever known behind." Will lets go of the tension he did not even realize he was holding, unable to form words. What could he say? Tell Hannibal that he knows what he feels like because his father beat him occasionally and didn't give him breakfast? Of all the insensitive things that would probably be the worst, so he says nothing. Hannibal turns to him expectantly, as if he is waiting for Will to piece it together. Will is about to shake his head in confusion when he sees something in Hannibal's eyes and the final pieces of the puzzle reveal themselves.

"You went back. You killed the rest of them," he says. A statement, not a question.

"Yes. All of them except one. My aunt's attendant girl saw it and stopped me before I could finish. She watches over him now, he is a permanent tenant in what has now become her home," Hannibal clarifies.

"There's something you're not telling me," Will accuses, and Hannibal's eyes glitter in the now afternoon light. "This explains the murder, but not the cannibalism. Why do you eat your victims? If they are so unworthy of their organs, why don't you just throw them away?"

Hannibal turns his head away, stubbornly refusing to say anything. He is not offended, but Will knows that he is alone in answering his question. He recounts the story, allowing the pendulum to swing. Mischa is dead. They take her away, and Hannibal never knew where. He never mentioned what they did to his parents' bodies. Will goes deeper into his mind, puzzling away at the evidence. The puzzle takes shape. Taking her body meant something. And then the puzzle draws itself together. Leftovers. Dried sausages. Mystery meat.

"How did your sister taste?"

Hannibal returns his gaze to Will, astoundment and awe written across his face. Will studies his eyes, really looks at them. They appear deep-set because of Hannibal's sharp zygomatic bones and pronounced upper orbital sockets, but they stand out on their own. There is a wisdom about them, not solely knowledge but the experience that comes with having lived many lives. The flecks of red are striking in the afternoon light. It is almost as if the leaves are reflecting the color of Hannibal's eyes.

"You really are something else, Will." The love is clearly written on his face as his eyes soften and cheeks lighten with added color. "My compassion for you is inconvenient. My instinct was always to kill, or at least self-preservation, and yet here I am, where I would give anything just to see you safe, even if it meant my life. Even if I could not have you, the knowledge that you were content would be enough. I do not admit this lightly, Will. Please do not forget it."

"Then you would waste your death because I do not think I can be happy in a world without you in it," Will replies. He wants to say something to tell Hannibal how much he means to him, that he would do anything for him. That he would burn down the world, but words are not Will's specialty, so he reaches over to the abandoned box he brought from his workshop. Hannibal looks at it as if he never noticed it before, which makes sense, Will concedes, as his eyes were closed when Will set it down. Will hands it to Hannibal, the slightly rectangular shape of it showcasing the elegant asymmetries present in the woodwork.

"David Allison was a very pious man," Hannibal muses, "He modeled Royce Hall after Milan's Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio, but he designed fifty-two imperfections as he claimed that nothing could be perfect but God."

"Are you calling my gift imperfect?" Will teases, earning a chuckle from Hannibal.

"Of course not," he reassures. "I merely noticed the connections between your work and his. It is beautiful, thank you."

"Open it," Will commands, stretching his legs out before him now that the heightened atmosphere has dissipated. Hannibal reverently traces the engravings with his fingers, and finally opens the latch. The inside of the box is much more plain, save for the singular doll laid on a piece of velvet. Its body and face are made of wood, soft features painted on delicately with bright colors. The hair is made from a fine yarn and braided, covered by a crown of flowers. It wears an embroidered dress with big white sleeves and a matching apron. The appearance is very homemade, but that is the intent. Will hopes he did the original justice. Hannibal stirs, as if waking from a trance. He gingerly lifts the doll out of the box, tracing over its features gently, as if afraid to touch it.

"Where did you get this?" He breathes.

"I made it, actually," Will explains. "I did not have time to get the one at your house, but I have a near-perfect memory, so I thought I would try to make it for you. I've been waiting for the opportunity to give it to you and now seems like a good time."

"I did not realize you had seen it," Hannibal amends.

"You're not the only one that likes to snoop around." At Hannibal's martyred look, Will laughs. "Oh, come on. Don't pretend like you did not break into my house and look around."

"I'm not upset, I just was not expecting it," Hannibal laughs. His brow furrows momentarily as a flicker of curiosity crosses his face. "Did you not find my basement?"

"Found it? Oh yes, I did. I just didn't go in because I knew I would have to report it, and I was not done with you at that point. Working in law enforcement helped me refine my thieving skills, except in this case, I was just being nosy." Will smiles. Joking about breaking and entering is not something he is used to, but then again, he is talking with the man who made cannibal puns as he was serving the remains of a person to his dinner guests, so there really is no judgment here.

"What a terror you are," Hannibal quips, "What am I to do with you?"

"You could start by making me dinner. Finding you out here was a herculean task," the response flows so easily out of Will, and he realizes he would be happy to do this forever.

"I'm sure you managed perfectly well," the other man responds.

"I really like apple pie, you know," adds Will, "and it isn't like we don't have options." He nods his head at the rows of apple trees. "I'm sure a talented chef like you can come up with something." He begins to stand, pulling Hannibal up by the hand.

"I'm not quite certain, beloved, apple pie for dinner might be pushing me to my limits," he says as he tucks a strand of Will's hair behind his ear. Will's cheeks color at the term of endearment, and he turns his head away to hide it.

"What is it? Have I said something wrong?" Hannibal asks, forehead creased in worry.

"No, it's not that. I just. . .well, you called me 'beloved'," he explains.

"Would you prefer it if I did not?" Will can see that Hannibal is not upset, he merely wants to make sure Will is comfortable. The thought fills Will's stomach with butterflies.

"I guess I'm just not used to being loved so. . ." he considers for a moment, "casually. The intense parts are exactly that: intense, but they are also overpowering, and I'm more accustomed to dealing with that. Pet names and terms of endearment are not something I ever saw myself having with anyone. It's nice." Will smiles, and he takes Hannibal's hand. The older man returns the pressure.

"Mylimasis," he whispers softly, as if testing the texture of the word in his mouth. "May I call you that?"

"What does it mean?" Will does not want to admit it, but he does not care what it means. Hannibal can call him whatever as long as he says it with the same breathless adoration every time.

"There is no direct translation, but similar words would be beloved, dearest, darling, the list goes on."

"I'd like that." A sudden wave of vertigo hits him, but it is over as soon as it happens.

"Are you alright, Will?" queries Hannibal, stepping closer to Will's side.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Let's go inside, I'm dying to eat something," says Will, rubbing his eyes. They walk back to the house, now illuminated by the light of the setting sun.

Chapter End Notes

The doll Will makes for Hannibal is an actual Lithuanian doll called "dzuke". This is what they look like: https://www.balticshop.com/shopping/pics/12117.m.jpg

The song Hannibal sings is an actual song, but it is Polish. I wanted to be able to translate it myself since I needed to actually understand the messaging behind it for the purpose of the story, so I went with Polish since I speak the language. The song is called "O Moj Rozmarynie" and you can listen to it here: https://youtu.be/1kwCU1JOqSE

Why the Caged Songbird No Longer Sings

Chapter Notes

TW: mentions of suicide attempt, mentions of self harm, drug abuse, overdose, etc.

Please use your best judgement and skip this chapter if you need to! Take care of yourselves, my lovelies :)

This chapter talks about Abigail. The story diverges from canon a bit, and it is definitely one of the instances where I came up with my own interpretation. I do not think this actually happened in the show, but the work this is based on mentioned her attempting suicide, and I wanted to elaborate on it. I love how clever Abigail is and how much of a survivor she was in the show, so this is just my take on what she would be like if it all became too much for her.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day Will begins to go back to his original routine, but it has changed considerably now. He wakes up in Hannibal's arms, or with Hannibal in his. They eat breakfast together, and Hannibal makes sandwiches, coming up with creative ways of pairing ham and cheese together that Will would never have thought of on his own. Will grumbles under his breath before he has downed at least one cup of coffee, which to his dismay endears him even more to Hannibal. To his surprise, Will finds out that when he is not waking Hannibal up at the crack of dawn, the man actually prefers to drink tea in the mornings. The tea set they have is handmade, a trinket Hannibal bought at the local market. Will also discovers a newfound love for pickles. Hannibal tells him that it is because Americans do not know how to make anything and that they defile their pickles with vinegar.

"All you need is salt, I truly cannot fathom how they deviated from the recipe to such an extent," he would say. Will finds that he loves this domestic version of Hannibal just as much as the righteous, calculated killer. Their companionable silences still exist, but their mornings are also often filled with banter and conversations about anything and everything. Anyone who ever saw them would assume that the two were completely incompatible, like oxygen and an open flame, bound to create destruction wherever they go. This turned out to be the furthest from the truth because Will loves the classical music that Hannibal plays on his piano. He loves cooking beside Hannibal, reveling in the looks of exasperation when he massacres a carrot. He adores listening to Hannibal read, even if he cannot understand the language. He knows that Hannibal is the same way. He often catches the older man staring at him passionately when he thinks Will is not looking. He notices that Hannibal plays the pieces he likes more often. He feels the warmth in Hannibal's eyes when he makes a dish Will really likes. Being seen for who he is, all of him, is an otherworldly experience because it is also the little things: the small quirks and mannerisms that make up who he is.

Will still goes into his workshop in the mornings, except now with a full stomach. This is the one place in the house Hannibal avoids. Will assumes it is because Hannibal wants him to have some semblance of privacy if he needs it, which he greatly appreciates. It is nice to be by himself for a few hours, even if he misses Hannibal during them. Besides, he needs to be focused when he works. Today he is making a bookcase. It is for a child's room, given the playful quality of the stained glass in the door frames. It is a waterfall sunrise, full of pastel hues. The top of the waterfall is a pale pink, reflecting the sky painted by a rising sun. The sun itself appears almost white, a trick of the light in the early morning. It looks like a portal to another world, he muses, and runs a finger along the edge of the frame. He is becoming increasingly aware of the fact that Hannibal has not killed anyone yet. "Yet" being the emphasized word, because Will knows it is only a matter of time. A spear is still a spear, even if one uses it as a walking stick, and Hannibal is a very sharp spear. It is not that he wants to change who Hannibal is, he truly loves every bit of the man, but he is so at peace with what they have and cannot help but listen to the eldritch voice in his head, taunting him that everything he holds dear will come crumbling down.

Will goes through the motions of the day like normal, making his last deliveries before dinner. As he pulls into their driveway, he notices Hannibal sitting on the steps with a picnic basket. Despite it being the middle of winter, the surrounding region was graced with a spell of warm weather, so a picnic would not actually be out of the question.

"Care to eat outside today, Will?" Hannibal asks, rising from the wooden steps of their home. Will saunters over to stand by his side, picking up the basket.

"The hill by our house looks very inviting. It would be the perfect place to watch the sunset." He sets off toward the hill to the side of their house, Hannibal shortly following in suit. "I was thinking about the sunrise today, actually," Will admits, stopping once they reach the top of the hill. "It is an interesting coincidence."

"The sunset often has connotations with death." Hannibal spreads the blanket on the ground, opening the basket to hand Will a wooden box with many small compartments. The plating is beautiful, as always. Rice balls wrapped in seaweed lay next to the salmon he caught the other day. A small stew of greens lets off steam on the side, covered in a thick, sweet-smelling sauce. What appears to be an omelet completes the dish. Will is about to attack the food with his fork when Hannibal hands him a glass of wine.

"Wine at a picnic? I can't take you anywhere," he jokes, but takes the wine gratefully.

"You told me of your aversion to breakfast foods, but it is not breakfast anymore." Hannibal looks at him, swirling the wine in his glass.

"Breakfast for dinner," Will muses, and he almost drops the glass when he sees a blur of brown hair and wind-chafed skin.

"Abigail?" he breathes, forcing air into his lungs.

"Yes, I made her breakfast for dinner. How did you know?" Hannibal queries, a little startled at the sudden intensity in Will's eyes. Will tears his gaze away from where he was

scrutinizing the landscape, searching for the delicate smile and innocent eyes hidden behind dark eyelashes.

"I, uh, I guess she must have told me," he stutters. Hannibal is not convinced, but he does not press further.

"Could you tell me about her? I never really got to see her other than. . ." Will trails off. He does not regret what he did, there was no other way, but the memory is still a painful scar etched in his mind.

"What would you like to know?" Hannibal asks, setting his wine aside.

"Everything, really, but I most want to know why she wanted to die so desperately. What did you do to her, Hannibal? Aside from the obvious." If the jab has affected Hannibal in any way, he does not show it.

"I did not 'do' anything to her. She made her own choices, and I helped her carry them out. When I went to Minnesota, she had run away from you, back to her old house. I was expecting to find her there, to help her." Will scoffs at this.

"Help her by faking her death?" What hurts more is that Hannibal did not trust him to tell him of their secret.

"Jack and the FBI were coming for her. She faced nothing but pain and a cage ahead of her. She was like a spark, in need of fuel and oxygen, not to be stepped on and snuffed out. I gave her the choice to stay there and try her fate with the legal system, or she could come with me. We faked her death in her house, and I took her ear. It was enough to identify her, but not something she would mourn the loss of too much. You know better than anyone what I did with it." Hannibal glances at Will, checking to see if he is becoming overwhelmed with the story given his personal and rather unpleasant connection to it.
"I do," he says dryly.

"I took Abigail back to my house. She stayed in one of my guest rooms, upstairs, far away from the rest of the house and prying eyes. However, something changed in her. She had discovered who I was, at least to an extent. I do not think she would have gone with me if she had known the full truth, but she did know that I had killed many people," he pauses, sipping the wine, and continues, "Abigail was a very clever girl. She actually figured it out herself." Hannibal smiles, the ghost of fondness creeping across his face. "She was not afraid of what I could do to her but rather what I wanted from her. I think she expected me to force her to kill, but that was not my intention. I meant to use her as a tool to hurt you." Anger rises within Will at these last words, hot and searing, but he also cannot help but be thankful that at least Hannibal is being honest with him. They spent so long speaking in half truths, riddles, communicating through lies of omission that the cold hard reality of the truth feels good, even if it stings. Hannibal continues, seeing the tension in Will's shoulders.

"You have every right to be angry, Will. I do not expect anything less of you," he supplies.

"Just keep talking," spits Will, trying to figure out what he plans to do.

"As you wish," Hannibal concedes, taking Will's glass and refilling it. "As I said, Abigail was a clever girl. She was very curious about anything and everything I could tell her, mainly about the human psyche. I told you that she had an aptitude for the psychological, and she clearly saw the opportunity living with me. After a week or so, she found me after I had returned from my office, a shyness about her that I had never seen before." He chuckles slightly at the memory. "She asked me if I could go to the store and get her some things. I told her I was going out the next day and asked what she needed. Seeing Abigail tongue-tied was a strange sight, averting her eyes, and fidgeting with her hands. Then I remembered that she was practically a teenage girl living in a man's house. I told her that if she needed any menstrual products she could find them under the sink in the bathroom next to her room, and that if she needed anything specific she could write me a list. She nodded her head, making a comment about how I would probably know a thing or two about washing blood out of things, and left the room."

"Well, do you know how to wash blood out of things?" Will jokes, blushing slightly at the awkwardness of the encounter.

"As a matter of fact, I do. Cold water and a lot of hydrogen peroxide usually work well enough," he considers. "Although if you spill more than a few pints of it on your favorite collared shirt you should save yourself the hassle and buy a replacement."

"I'm assuming that wasn't the end of it," Will says, a slight mocking tone entering his voice.

"No, it was not." The lighthearted tone disappears as Hannibal's eyes darken. "Things were normal for a while after that. She was Abigail, and I went about my business as usual for the most part. I was folding the laundry one day, and I noticed a splotch of blood on one of her shirt sleeves." Will knows where this is going.

"She was cutting herself," he whispers. Their food is practically abandoned, but this is more important.

"Yes. I went to her room, and I think she saw something in my face because she hung her head and let me in. I held out my hand, silently asking her to take it. She did, so I rolled up the sleeves of her shirt. Angry red lines stared back at me, claiming her wrist with a fiery vengeance. She had never looked so afraid until now, even when she had killed Nick Boyle." Hannibal shakes his head. "She thought I would hurt her. Why, I do not know. I held her then. She was a survivor, but the tragedies she had endured were too much for her. The emotion of it all was too painful to bear. I should have seen it, but I did not. She hid it well, knowing I would notice if bandages from my surgical kit were missing." Realization dawns on Will.

"So that's why she was so weird when she asked you for. . ." he trails off.

"Yes, I believe so. Clever girl. Good for absorbing blood, and rather inconspicuous. She knew I could not take them away from her, so I gave her some proper bandages, vaseline, and told her how to clean the cuts properly."

"I don't think she was expecting that," Will says as he folds his legs under himself.

"She definitely was not. I of course told her she should not, but there was not really anything I could do to stop her. I knew that I could not help her unless she wanted it, so I let her be." He turns his head away to look at the darkening sky. "One day, I returned early from work to find the house very quiet. This was not exactly unusual because Abigail kept quiet during the day when I was not there to avoid any suspicion. Nevertheless, I went to my study, where I kept my medical bag."

"Overdose?" Will prompts.

"Yes, she found the oxycodone tablets. I'm assuming she crushed them before swallowing them since there were not many missing. I found her there, on the floor, pulse thready. I did not expect her to escalate the way she did. I think this time she really wanted to die. Looking back, the razor cuts were more to gauge my reaction than anything else. At this point she was unresponsive, so I gave her IV fluids and naloxone. There was nothing more I could do for her if she did not have the determination to keep going. The will to live is a strong factor in determining what one can survive. I have seen it countless times in the ER during my time as a surgeon." Hannibal pauses there, taking a moment to sip the tea he also brought with them. Swallowing deeply, he continues.

"I could not watch her the entire time since I still had work and other things to take care of. I made the decision to restrain her in her bed. I did not want to risk her waking up at the beginning of the day and being left free to roam around while I was still hours away. I told myself it was the right decision at the time. She had a catheter and IV fluids, she would be fine, physically speaking, but I think that decision is what solidified her fate. I returned to find her awake, but her eyes were dead. Bright red rings of traumatized skin swelled around the velcro as she had obviously tried to free herself. I decided to take her to one of my other properties for a while."

"So that's why you took those few days off. I always wondered what you were up to, although at the time I assumed it had to do with Miriam Lass, or now that I think about it, Abel Gideon," Will ponders aloud. At first he thought that hearing about Abigail's attempt would be too much for him, but it is giving him the closure he needs.

"Miriam Lass actually did have something to do with it. I needed to accelerate my plans to reveal her to Jack," explains Hannibal. "The goal was always to frame dear Frederick, and I even said as much to Gideon in the BSHCI when I visited him there, but I needed her back in the game before I could do anything else." He offers the thermos filled with tea to Will, and Will takes it gratefully. It is not very warm anymore, but that is alright. The evening has not cooled yet, and Will does not feel cold.

"Then I came along and messed everything up," chuckles Will. "Falling in love was not something you had planned for. All your meticulous scheming down the drain like that."

"Do you torment me like this on purpose, or is it just a byproduct of your self-congratulation for catching me?" Hannibal teases, plucking the thermos out of Will's hands playfully.

"Oh, don't act like you don't deserve it. You're terrible. The worst." Will attempts to wrestle the thermos back, but Hannibal pins him down. Will is about to attempt to escape, but the expression on Hannibal's face makes him go still.

"I never told you this, but I think I always loved you. Something changed in me that day I first laid eyes on you, I simply did not realize it until much later." He plucks an errant strand of hair from Will's forehead, cupping his cheek. "I originally was going to kill you, you know."

"What made you change your mind?" Will asks, morbid fascination overpowering any feelings of anger he has.

"The day I killed Tobias, I thought he had killed you. The idea that you were dead was. . . unpleasant. It completely threw me. That is when I decided I could not kill you, so I framed you instead. It was the only way I could keep you alive because you were not ready to see yet. You needed time that I did not have." Hannibal looks wistful, as if reminiscing over fond memories instead of the time they were locked in a destructive tango, hurtling toward mutual destruction.

"I feel like I've always loved you. Looking back on it, I see it in my actions, in my thoughts, but it was as if I had not unlocked that part of my mind at the time. I think the breaking point was when we were burning your patient notes. It was as if something inside of myself was pleading for you to notice that I was going to double cross you, which is why I did not change my shirt after meeting with Freddie Lounds. Even then, you did not notice, and after listening to what you told me about your mind palace, that same thing in me leaned forward, into your personal space, hoping that you would smell her perfume on me. I just needed you to be safe." Will has tears in his eyes now, and brushes them away forcefully. "That's why I called you, you know. It was a complete disregard of any morality I had left, calling you. Nothing else mattered in that moment, nothing but your safety. I would deal with the fallout on my own, but at least you would be free and alive." He sniffs. Will finds Hannibal's wrists, tracing the jagged scars from when he sent Matthew Brown after the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal shudders at the touch, inhaling sharply.

"I'm not sorry," Will declares, putting more pressure behind his touch.

"Neither am I," Hannibal replies, utterly enraptured by Will.

"Good," hisses Will as pulls Hannibal down and kisses him.

Hannibal is so stunned by the sudden action that he loses the ability to move, barely even breathing. Will attempts to bring Hannibal back into his body, whispering softly against his mouth. The moment passes and suddenly Will is being kissed back. He melts into the blanket, into the grass, becoming one with the Earth so that he can witness Hannibal forever. Their mouths both taste slightly sweet from the wine, and Will loses himself in it. He wraps his arms around Hannibal to press him even closer. He can feel their hearts beating together, rippling echoes of each other. He has never kissed anyone for the sake of just kissing them, but with Hannibal there is no expectation. It is merely them together in this moment and nothing else.

Hannibal breaks away first, his face inches away from Will's, noses barely brushing together. His eyes bore into Will, carving out a place for himself in the forts within Will's mind. Will feels the pressure of the older man's dexterous fingers on the high point of his cheekbones, on his brow bone, ghosting over his lips. Sighing contentedly, he reaches up to kiss Hannibal

again. He kisses him slowly because he can, they have all the time now to commit every detail of the other to memory.
Neither notices the eyes glaring at them from the shadows.

Chapter End Notes

Oxycodone tablets are often made in a way that will have a delayed-release effect so you don't get the full dose right away. This means that if you crush them, you mess up the mechanism and get a much higher dose, making overdosing a lot easier with fewer tablets.

I have been posting daily so far, and I think that streak is probably going to break either tomorrow or the next day. I'm off of spring break now, so I can't spend all day writing, sadly.

Who Holds the Devil, Let Him Hold Him Well

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this is a shorter chapter than usual. The dialogue took a lot out of me because of how philosophical it is, and I would rather post a shorter chapter that I'm happy with than writing some bs just to fit the word count.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will goes about his morning as usual when a violent rapping on the front door interrupts him in the middle of devouring leftover apple pie. At this rate they are going to have to buy another orchard. Setting his fork down in frustration, he glances over at Hannibal, who is nursing a cup of steaming tea in one hand with what looks like Oscar Wilde in the other. The older man looks up from the book, frowning slightly.

"It could merely be the neighbors," he ventures, not entirely convinced. Will is not convinced either.

"Yeah, it might." He picks up a slender knife from the block on the counter and stashes it in his pocket. "Better go answer it." He sees Hannibal follow him down the hallway out of the corner of his eye. Bracing himself, he opens the door to find a very short middle-aged woman with grey streaks in her frizzy hair. He stares. She stares back. Hannibal decides to rescue them from the purgatory they brought down upon themselves and greets her in Italian.

"Buongiorno Signora," he says politely. She brightens up with one of the most painfully fake smiles Will has ever seen, which is saying something considering his former profession. The two of them converse back and forth for a bit, and Will zones out. He knows some Italian, but this does not seem worth the effort. The knife in his pocket feels heavier than lead. This woman is just his neighbor, making polite conversation. He is jolted back into reality when they switch to English. He learns that the woman's name is Greta, and that she lives on the opposite side of their street. Her accent is thick, but she speaks slowly enough that Will is able to get most of it, exchanging his own pleasantries and even mentioning the pleasant weather the last few days.

"That is actually a good segue for what I am here about," she explains, blushing slightly, as if embarrassed by what she has to say. "My husband was out in the front garden the other night and. . ." The other night? His mind flashes to the picnic. Oh God, if he had heard anything. . . "Well he wanted me to come and ask," she swallows, "if you could, ehm, try to be more private about. . ." She trails off again and Will is about to explode in anticipation of what she is going to say. He throws a glance at Hannibal, who obviously knows exactly what she is trying to say. Will is busy wondering if he should invest time into becoming a psychiatrist when Hannibal opens his mouth and speaks through gritted teeth.

"If I am understanding correctly, your husband has an issue that I kissed my partner on our own property, in the evening when it was dark and you could only see us if you were looking?" The tone is polite as always, but the words are clearly biting.

"I. . ." she stammers, "I'm sorry, my husband insisted that I come." Will can tell that this is the main part of what is irking Hannibal, that the man could not even confront them himself.

"I understand, you are just doing your duty to your husband," Hannibal assures. After a moment, he adds, "Would the both of you like to join us for dinner tonight?" Dinner. Oh no. Greta grins, and all Will can think about is how this was the inevitability that he was desperate to avoid. Hannibal, the spear, finally poised to strike.

"NO!" He shrieks before he can stop himself. Both Hannibal and Greta look at him with raised eyebrows. He clears his throat. "Excuse me, I just remembered that we were supposed to go fishing today." He shoots a warning look at Hannibal. "We don't have any fresh meat in the fridge," he adds, praying that Hannibal takes the hint.

"My apologies," says the older man, "perhaps another time?"

"We will look forward to it," Greta replies, desperately trying to recover from the disruption. Will says his farewells, making it clear that her visit is over, and closes the door behind her. As soon as she is out of earshot, he explodes. The pent up energy within him rises, coming over him in waves.

"We aren't killing them," he spits, an icy undertone creeping into his voice.

"And why would that be?" Hannibal taunts.

"I think the better question is why would we kill them in the first place?" He circles around Hannibal, pinning him between himself and the door.

"They were rude to us," Hannibal points out, shifting his stance. To an outsider, the switch would be minimal, but to Will it is like Hannibal told him directly that he is expecting a fight.

"I'm not letting you have them." There is no way Will can explain how he feels in a way Hannibal would understand, but the words are clearly the wrong ones, nevertheless, because Hannibal's face completely closes itself off, a perfect tabula rasa.

"Why the sudden loyalty to our lovely neighbors? Do they perhaps represent something for you that you feel is missing in your life?" The resentment rings clearly, striking at Will like a snake.

Will steps closer, tilting his head up to meet Hannibal's eyes. "Is that jealousy, doctor?" he strikes at Hannibal where he knows it will hurt. "It does not suit you." A twinge crosses Hannibal's face for a second and disappears. Before Hannibal can retort, he adds, "Killing them would be cruel."

"Cruelty is a gift humanity has given itself." His expression is still entirely unreadable.

"It would be wrong." Will stiffens, holding his footing, and before he can regret it enunciates, "Killing without cause is wrong." This is the final straw.

"On whose morality?" Hannibal sneers. "On yours? On God's? Do you think God cares?"

"If you think the concept of God has any sway on my actions then you do not know me," he spits the words out as if they are burning him. At this point the conversation has transcended the dinner invitation, and they are playing in the fourth dimension where the rules are warped and each move must be calculated with absolute precision. "No, I don't think God cares, but you do. Are you playing God, Hannibal? He would not help you, so you act as judge, jury, and executioner in his stead."

"If I am God, then you are His sacrificial lamb. You cringe away from your actions like a lamb cowers before the butcher. At least I do not delude myself with a rose colored version of reality and masquerade as a moral man." The words sting and Hannibal knows it. "Morality is a construct. Our actions dictate the perception of morality, not the other way around. You said killing makes God feel powerful. Tell me, does denying me make you feel powerful?"

"If it did, that would make me God." Will steps back, wary of the trap Hannibal is goading him into.

"So it would," Hannibal retorts. "Are you the butcher or the lamb, Will?"

"The choices you give me are to stain myself with an innocent's blood or to have my own blood spilled? Not much of a choice." His hands drop to his sides, the sound of flesh against his work pants permeating through the silence.

"Innocent? I would argue that the innocents you speak of are anything but undeserving of your wrath." Hannibal bites back.

"It may be who you are, but it isn't what I am. I don't need people to fear me to know where I am with myself." This is not even true. He knows Hannibal does not care, but at this point he is itching for Hannibal to lose his cool, to do something other than stand there, a mountain in the storm.

"If it disgusts you so, you are free to go back to allowing the criminals you let into your head to torment you up to your breaking point." He steps closer to Will, close enough for their breaths to mingle in the air.

"No single person has tormented me as much as you. You brought me to my breaking point. You watched me fall to my knees and you shot me in the back of my head, convincing everyone I ever cared about that I had done it to myself, and then you killed those that didn't believe." Will quivers at these last words, visions of Beverly dissected in the glass panels swarming behind his eyes.

"Your so-called friends pitied you at best and despised you at worst. Beverly. Alana. Abigail–" Before he can finish, Will slams him into the door, the knife pressed against his throat.

"Don't you DARE bring Abigail into this," he drawls, pressing the knife hard enough to draw a thin line of blood. Hannibal has the audacity to smile. He slowly draws his hand up, pressing two fingers to the side of his throat, just below where Will is pressing the knife into his skin.

"This is my carotid artery, which feeds oxygen to my brain." His voice is low, but it drops to a whisper, "You could sever it, cut the tether and watch the blood flow. It is how I was going to kill her." He looks directly into Will's eyes. "Are you going to kill me now?" Will considers it, then shakes his head, lowering the knife.

"No. It would be too merciful for you." He jeers, still pressing Hannibal against the door.

"The optimist believes we live in the best of all possible worlds. The pessimist fears this is true. This is your best possible world, Will. This is your reality. You and I are the same."

Will leaves Hannibal there, the glisten of fresh blood still forming a necklace around his throat, and disappears. It has been a long time since he last climbed a tree, but the boughs feel familiar under his calloused hands, and he quickly scales the lower branches until he reaches the canopy. Hannibal is surely well acquainted with Will's fight or flight response. The branches are bare, having let go of their leaves many moons ago, but Will welcomes the exposure. He is not easily visible from the ground, but he feels naked, stripped down to the very fibers of his skin. The gentle wind kisses his forehead, leaving a pink tinge in its wake. I do not hide from God. The words echo through his skull as if it is a cave, the intent behind Hannibal's words becoming clear. There was no fall from grace for him in his transformation, not in this life. He was always destined for the damned. Let there be no pretending then, no more facades and false heavens. If he was made for Hell, let it be Hell.

The sky opens up, a gaping maw of nothing and everything at once, waiting to devour him. Suddenly, he is falling, the ground rushing to meet him, and his knees buckle beneath the impact. It takes a few seconds for his head to clear, so he does not notice the man standing a few inches away from him. It is a miracle he did not crash into him on the way down. There is something off about the man, but Will cannot place exactly what it is. He is only standing there, after all. Will takes a second look at him, taking in the used work clothes, sturdy frame, an expression of distaste written across his features. Wincing, he picks himself up off the floor, noticing a twinge in the shoulder that broke his fall.

"Uh, hi," he says, catching his breath. "Do you speak English?" The man eyes him, clearly satisfied by the turn of events.

"As a matter of fact I do," comes the reply, "I believe you've already been acquainted with my wife, Greta." Perfect, this is just what Will needs right now.

"Yeah, I met her this morning," he pauses, "It's a shame I couldn't talk to you though."

"Is it now?" The man's accent is there, but much more subtle. He does not search for words mid-sentence like his wife.

"Yes. If you have a problem with us, why not come yourself?" Will queries, still recovering from the impact of the fall.

"Ah because that would have been premature. I wanted to gauge your reaction to my wife before I did anything." Okay, this guy is definitely acting strange. At this point there is not anything Will can do but pry for more information.

"And why is that?" He asks, a hint of irritation slips into his tone, causing him to internally wince.

"I will only answer that if you can answer my question first. Quid pro quo." The man smiles sinisterly, feet firmly planted in place.

"Um, okay sure. Go ahead." Will has absolutely no idea what this guy wants, and he is not sure if it is wise to stay and find out.

"What is your name?" The man smiles now, white teeth glinting.

"Peter Hill," comes the response. "Now will you tell me why it would be premature?"

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves." The man grins even wider. "I meant your real name." Will freezes. Surely the man does not actually know who he is. This has to be some practical joke.

"I don't know what you're talking about. My name is Peter Hill, has been since I was born," He retorts, unsure of what else he can say.

"If you are not going to be honest with me, the conversation cannot continue. Fine. Perhaps you would be more willing to give me the name of your. . . friend." The man's jeering expression is unmistakable now. He knows.

"What do you want with him?" Will's heart races. It makes sense that this man would have a quarrel with Hannibal over him, but there are pieces missing, plot holes. How did he even know Will would be here?

"Aren't you worried that he'll get bored of you and eat you? Or is that part of the appeal?" The sun glares in the man's blond hair, far too bright for a cloudy winter day. Will blinks in shock.

"Look man," he says. "I really don't know where you're going with this so either spit it out or let me be on my way."

"Easy there, I only want to do business with you. Man to man. I'm glad I can get you on your own. You're not as dangerous as he is." Will would show him dangerous.

"No, I guess I'm not," he says instead. Antagonism is not going to get him anywhere.

"I want something extremely rare, and difficult to come by." When Will raises his eyebrows, the man quickly adds. "I want information, Will." There it is. The man knows his name, and probably Hannibal's. Will needs to do something, and quickly, but he needs time. "Why don't we walk, and you can tell me all about it, huh?"

"What gives you the impression that I'm going to give it to you?" Will retorts. He wants to see what the man can threaten him with first.

"Oh you will give me everything I want. Willingly, too. Are you familiar with the schematics of this town?" When Will shakes his head he chuckles. "I thought not. Each house on this street runs on natural gas. The most common gas lines are made with black iron, and the houses here are not an exception. Do you know what happens to black iron over time? That's right, it can corrode, deteriorating the sealant. I don't think you need me to explain what happens when someone sets off sparks near that much gas. Your stove does it everyday on a much more controlled level." Will is taken aback. Of all the threats, he was not expecting one that would actually be dangerous. He has no way of knowing how quickly it is set to go off, and with Hannibal still in the house. . .he has no choice but to play along.

"Fine. But I'm not going anywhere with you. We're fine where we are," he answers, appalled that the man would be so obvious in trying to move their location when the rest of his plan is so meticulous.

"Suit yourself," the man huffs. "I'm Mattia, by the way. It's only fair that you know my name since I know quite a bit about you already." Will really could not care less for pleasantries with his blackmailing neighbor, so he just nods.

"Well, the stage is open, ask away," he remarks.

"How long have you been letting him fuck you? Since you ran away together or has it been longer than that?" Will's jaw drops. Mattia has nerve, he'll give him that, but he's also terribly rude.

"Why are you so interested in my sex life?" He blurts out before he realizes that Mattia is actually expecting him to answer.

"It's less your sex life in relation to you and more to him," Mattia clarifies. "I'm just curious what would drive a somewhat normal man to play house with a serial-killing cannibal."

"Hey, do you mind if I sit down for a bit, my legs hurt something awful after falling out of the tree," Will says, stalling for time.

"Look, I know what you're doing. You are obviously stalling, but sure, you can sit down. Now answer the question, or I'm going to lose my patience," he spits, his lips curling in impatience.

Will does not know what to tell him. The truth is obviously out of the question because the man would obviously not believe it, especially since he thinks Will is just here along for the ride instead of running the freak show alongside Hannibal. What can he say? That he loves Hannibal to the point of pain because the man is the only one in the world that is capable of

seeing him for what he is? That they are two sides of the same coin? No, he obviously can't. Without a second thought, Will kicks out his leg, knocking the feet out from under Mattia. He is about to pounce on top of him when a cracking sound thousands of times louder than a gunshot knocks him on his back. Completely forgetting about Mattia, he turns toward the source, and the color drains from his face. Snaking pillars of smoke erupt into the sky, billowing tongues of fire raging below them. The entire house is gone, completely vanished, vaporized in the explosion. He feels himself slipping forward, and he does not resist anymore, letting the darkness claim him.

Chapter End Notes

I really enjoy the dialogue concerning God and religion in the show because even though I'm an atheist, both Hannibal's and Will's perspectives on the topic are how I would view God. Hannibal sees a cynical, bloodthirsty deity, much akin to the Abrahamic Old Testament interpretation. He says that God is terrific, and that killing must feel good to Him. He uses this interpretation to justify his actions in the world because he believes that God sees people as he does. Will is a bit less passionate about his views, and his interpretation is much more apathetic. He sees it more as God failing to save humanity, citing the inelegance of interrupting suffering, as elegance is more important than suffering. I really hope I expressed their views at least somewhat accurately in this. That's enough rambling on my end. Next chapter will be up tomorrow since I managed to get a lot done today.

Soup Isn't Good for the Soul

Chapter Notes

Depressed Will hours ahead, I apologize in advance.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's eyes feel like they hold the weight of every ocean on Earth, but he blinks them open anyway. A bright, clinical light assaults his pupils, and it takes him a moment to adjust to his surroundings. He is in a bed, an IV in his arm. He feels a thin, scratchy blanket beneath his fingers. It's irritating, making him feel like ants are crawling beneath his skin. The steady beeping of a heart monitor claims his attention. Oh. He is in the hospital. He tries to sit up, but his arms are restrained. A nurse pops his head into the room, smiling.

"Ah, Mr. Graham, you're finally awake. Let me get Jack for you," he croons, leaving the room.

Jack? As in THE Jack Crawford? This has to be some bad dream, a cruel nightmare, or maybe he did actually die that fateful night in Hannibal's kitchen and he has finally woken up in Hell. He needs to stop spiraling, get a hold of himself, and analyze the facts. He can work with facts. For one, he is in the hospital. The nurses speak English without an accent, or at least this one does. Jack Crawford is here. This is probably the United States, in that case, but where is the question. He tries to go back, retrace his steps up until this point, but the memories are unavailable to him, covered in a thick fog, as if they were nothing but a dream. He is met with the knowledge that the one person who could make this all right is definitely not here. Hannibal's absence is like a hole in his gut, nothing but the overwhelming sense of absence. He closes his eyes, closing off his senses in an effort to concentrate. He is greeted with a blackness so profound he cannot breathe. It is all consuming, despairing, and it pulls him in. He resists, but it just pulls harder, tearing at his very conscience. The only thing he can do is give in and let go. The memories begin to surface, as if rising from within the deepest recesses of his mind, dripping black from a lake of tar. The smell of smoke and the heat of flames hit him. He remembers Mattia, and the explosion. Oh God, Hannibal was in the house. Is he dead? Hannibal can't die, he just can't. What can Will do now? He thinks harder, noticing that something about the memory is off. The picture glitters, as if someone had deliberately painted it in his mind. The spinning visuals are beginning to give him vertigo, which is when he recounts his occasional bouts of nausea, vertigo, the trouble focusing, the loss of appetite at the picnic, Abigail, and Mattia. Their blank, waxy faces glare at him, rippling with the liquid. Hallucinations. The fire, the smoke, the explosions, not real? Then Hannibal might not actually be dead. He tries not to let himself hope, but. . .

It hits him like a ton of bricks. Encephalitis. He must have had a relapse. And now he is trapped in an American hospital with Jack Crawford due at any second. He has to assume he is alone in this, that Hannibal is not going to help him. Giving credence to wishful thinking

will never get him anywhere. If he believes Hannibal is coming, then he will be relying on an unknown variable, and there can be no unknowns in this game of chess. The base instinct for self-preservation courses within his veins. He can lie, he will lie. Jack Crawford has no way of knowing what happened other than he left with Hannibal and disappeared, which Will can use to his advantage. The FBI has nothing, and as long as Mattia was actually a hallucination, he is the only person they have that can tell them anything. They must have restrained him because they are unsure where he stands. Will sits back, a hidden grin dulling the ache in his legs. Falling out of the tree was probably real, then.

Jack walks in with a purposeful gait. He looks older since the last time Will saw him, a certain hardness in his eyes that was not there before. His hair is more grey, his face more lined. Dealing with his antics must be an exhausting job, Will thinks. He looks at Jack a second time, noticing the snaking scar on the right side of his neck. It has long since healed, but the jaggedness of it is jarring to say the least. So that's why Jack was not present when Will arrived at Hannibal's house. Will likely saved his life by calling ERT when he did, even if he meant for them to get to Alana. Jack pulls a chair to himself, and sits beside Will's bed. He opens his mouth to say something, but Will beats him to it.

"Encephalitis," he croaks. His throat is scratchy from lack of use. "Could I have some water?" Jack lifts the cup to his lips, and he drinks, the cool liquid blooming within his chest as he gulps it. Will looks at his restraints, then at Jack, and raises a single eyebrow.

"No funny business?" Jack askes, skeptical. "Forgive me if I'm worried that you'll try to pull something."

"Me? You do realize that I wasn't with him because I wanted to be." Will rolls his eyes. He needs to do this well. Jack is not the head of the BAU for nothing.

"Oh? Do tell." Jack raises both eyebrows, still not convinced.

"Since you aren't in a rush to take these off," he clenches and releases his fists, feeling the velcro restraints tightening under the movement, "I'm going to start by asking what happened. We're in the US, right? Last I remember I was in Italy."

"That would be correct," says Jack carefully. "You were admitted to a Hospital in Palermo. One of the nurses there must have been a fan of TattleCrime because she recognized you. We tried to keep this entire mess out of the news, but Freddie Lounds has her ways. Anyway, the nurse called the American authorities, and we transferred you here as soon as you were stable enough to move." He puts a hand on Will's good shoulder. "Will, I need you to tell me how you got there. I need to know anything you can tell me about Hannibal. We need to catch him, and this is your chance to redeem yourself. You're not doing too hot in the eyes of the FBI right now." Will nods. He was expecting as much.

"Look Jack, I'll tell you everything, but now that I know I was having a relapse, I'm not sure how much of it was real." He looks down, pretending to look unsure of himself.

"According to your doctors, your encephalitis progressed very quickly. You would have had minimal symptoms up until the point that you started having vivid hallucinations," Jack assures.

"Alright." Will clears his throat. "Should I start at the beginning then?" When Jack nods, he continues. "I got to his house after you were already down, I'm guessing. Alana was lying outside in a pile of broken glass. I called ERT. I had my gun, I should have shot him, but then I saw Abigail and my body just stopped working. I thought I was seeing a ghost, but she was real, right?" Jack does not say anything. Will recognizes the tactic. He's withholding information to see if Will will slip up. He can not believe that he is grateful for having encephalitis, but any inconsistencies could be blamed on the illness, and Jack would have no way of proving that Will is lying through his teeth. He continues.

"Anyway, Abigail was there. He came up behind me." Avoiding saying Hannibal's name is a deliberate choice. He needs to establish animosity with a bit of fear sprinkled in for this to work. "I just stood there like a deer in headlights. He must have been counting on that being my reaction to seeing her." He closes his eyes, feigning struggling to remember. He needs to explain why his blood was there since there is no chance that the analysis team missed it. "He tried to stab me. I'd lift my shirt to show you, but. . ." he glances pointedly at the restraints. Jack is a brick wall. "I dodged most of it. After that he knocked me out, and I woke up in a house. Apparently it wasn't worth the trouble to just kill me. He must have drugged me because I have no recollection of getting there, and I must have been out for a while since we were in Italy, which is not very close to Baltimore."

"How did you know you were in Italy?" queries Jack. This is a good sign. His story must match up with what the FBI have, or otherwise Jack would be questioning him more, trying to trip him up.

"He never told me, but it was quite obvious from small details. I can't pinpoint it exactly, but I also know he has a connection to Italy, so I figured that was probably the case."

He needs to know something before he can continue. It was winter when he fell from the tree, but with the coma, there is no way of knowing how much time has passed. "How long was I out, Jack?"

"A few months. We thought you might not make it," comes the reply. That explains the soreness in his limbs. His muscles must have atrophied at least a little by now. The information also solidifies his suspicion that he is on his own for this one. A few months would have been plenty of time for Hannibal to find him. Now the main mystery is how he even got to the hospital in the first place.

"That long?" He feigns surprise. Jack nods solemnly. Something in the atmosphere shifts, and Jack's expression hardens. He makes a show of removing his wire, breaking the microphone off.

Will chuckles. "You'll be crucified for that, you know."

"I know. But I need you to be honest with me, as a friend," Jack quips. He clearly does not trust Will, but Will's story matches up with the official one, so he is running out of options. Will ponders the risk of removing the wire. If Will actually says something, Jack won't be able to use it against him. He sweeps his eyes over the room, unsure what exactly he is looking for. His eyes land on a metal vase filled with flowers. Bingo. Smart, he thinks. Bugging the room is a good strategy. That way if Will has any communication with anyone,

the FBI will be all over it before he can do anything. Even anything he says in his sleep could be helpful. It also means that the business with the wire was just for show. Jack is undoubtedly still recording every word he says.

Jack reaches into a black bag Will had not noticed until now and pulls out the doll Will made for Hannibal. The confusion on his face is genuine. Will has absolutely no idea how Jack managed to get a hold of the doll, but it does not matter. The mere existence of the doll proves that the house did not actually explode, and that the interaction with Mattia was almost certainly part of the hallucination.

"What's that?" Will asks, caution in his tone.

"I was hoping you could tell me," responds Jack. "They found you collapsed on the ground outside the hospital with it clutched in your hand." Will has no memory of grabbing the doll, much less getting himself to the hospital, but this is the exact question he needs to anwer. Then it clicks. Hannibal left it for him. He must have found Will after he fell from the tree and took him to the hospital. He must have gone out of his way because Palermo is not exactly close to their house in the countryside. A pang of sadness courses through him as he realizes that Hannibal left him in a foreign hospital and now at the mercy of the FBI. He tries to shake the feeling off. Hannibal is alive and safe, and that is all that matters.

"I've never seen it before in my life," he lies.

"Your fingerprints are on it. So are Hannibal Lecter's," Jack prods, clearly unconvinced.

"Obviously it's going to have mine, you found me holding it after all," Will spits, frustrated at the game Jack is trying to play with him. "I have no idea how I got it. Maybe I grabbed it when I tried to run away."

"You tried to run away?"

"Well I had to get to the hospital somehow, didn't I? I obviously don't remember, but do you really think he would risk capture just to get me medical attention? My well being is usually not very high on his list of priorities, especially when it comes to encephalitis." Antagonizing Hannibal in this way hurts more than he wants to admit, especially as he realizes that the last time he saw Hannibal he was holding a knife to his throat. A single tear escapes, leaving a wet trail along his cheek. "I'm sorry, Jack. This is all a bit overwhelming." At this Jack softens a little. Seeing Will cry must move something in him because he takes Will's hand, and speaks more softly.

"We're going to keep you here a bit longer. You need some more time to recover, and I can't let you go quite yet. We need to look into this a bit more, but after that you can go home. Depending on how this new information goes over, I'll see if you can go back to teaching. Unless you don't want the position anymore."

"That would be very kind of you, Jack." He squeezes Jack's hand weakly. If he's on his own, he needs them to trust him. Finding Hannibal can wait until after he gets discharged, if Hannibal even wants to be found. Jack starts getting up, but Will stops him, suddenly remembering. "Is Alana ok? Is she alive?"

"Yeah, Alana is doing better. I'm not going to give you any details since they're not mine to give, but you probably saved her life. You could possibly see her if you want to, I'll leave you her number." Jack smiles. This is the Will he remembers. Guilt slowly blooms inside Will because he knows damn well that he will not be calling Alana anytime soon. He is glad that she is alright, but that part of his life is behind him, and he does not intend to ever look back again.

Will watches Jack disappear through the door, frowning when he realizes that Jack not only did not give him Alana's number, but he also left the doll on the nightstand. Before he can consider the implications of this, a nurse comes in to take his vitals and change his fluids. There is not anything remarkable about her, a typical American woman in her mid-thirties. She could fit in anywhere, but she smiles sweetly and apologizes when she has to poke him again after missing his vein the first time.

"It's alright," Will chuckles. "My veins were always a bit stubborn." She eyes the restraints binding his wrists.

"You're not going to go anywhere, right? If I let you go?" she asks meekly.

"No, of course not. I don't have anywhere to go even if I wanted to. I don't even know where I am." She nods then, clearly having made her decision, but she does not say anything else. So much for trying to figure out where he is. It must be somewhere near Quantico if Jack was able to get here so quickly, or the man was just waiting around. This second option seems highly unlikely though if Jack is not lying about Will being out of it for months. The nurse, Mathilde, according to her name tag, reaches over and undoes the velcro binding his hands.

"Thanks," he says, and he means it. Rubbing his wrists to get the circulation back. He hopes she does not get in too much trouble. If he is correct about the room being bugged, which he is almost certain he is, then whoever is listening will have heard her voice.

The next few days begin to blend together. The most significant thing about the recent events in his life is that they are all excruciatingly boring. They begin to wean him off of the antibiotics that accompanied the acyclovir, making sure any underlying causes were treated. Now there's only one tube in his arm, supplying nutrients since he is not able to keep regular food down yet. They remove his catheter, which is just as unpleasant as he remembers from the last time he was stabbed and hospitalized due to an infection. Staph, if he recalls correctly. The flowers begin to wilt, and someone replaces them while he is sleeping, the metallic glint of the same vase smirking at him.

A week passes. Two. He does not have any visitors aside from the few nurses that he has grown accustomed to. Apart from his physical therapy appointments, he does not leave the small room. He really hopes that the FBI is paying for it because he would have asked to be discharged a few days after he woke up. At this point, he would be less doomed if he got encephalitis again and died than facing the mountain of medical bills. By all accounts, he does not need to be here. He is able to move around on his own for the most part, he has not tried to escape, he is eating solid food, and he finished his last dose of antibiotics last week. The only thing he really needs to come in for is his physical therapy, but he could finish that at an outpatient clinic instead of at the hospital, taking up valuable space. Something, or someone, does not want him to leave. There are no guards outside his room, but he feels

claustrophobic, as if he is being watched. He decides to try his luck again and waits for the next time Mathilde is assigned to his floor, speculating that he has the biggest chance with her since she is the least stiff with him, often engaging in polite conversation if she has the time. He waves at her when she walks in, and she returns the gesture, her dirty blonde waves bouncing softly with her steps. The timing here needs to be precise, up to the very second. As she walks closer to check his vitals, he drops his cup of water on the floor, mumbling an apology. Mathilde brushes past him, reaching down below the bed to retrieve the cup. As she straightens, he catches her arm, and she freezes, fear rising off of her. He holds her in place and leans in, whispering so quietly he is afraid she will not hear him.

"I really need to know where I am. Please," he begs, letting go of her arm, an apology written on his face. She looks like she is about to be sick. Please. He mouths. She looks ready to run out the door, but after a second look at his face, she smiles sadly. Under the guise that she is fluffing his pillows, Mathilde leans over him.

"The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland," she whispers. Will freezes. Oh, ohhhhh. Something tells him this is the last he will be seeing of Mathilde, so he gives her his best smile and mouths thank you, but he is not actually paying attention. His insides are churning, the simmering pot finally coming to a boil. Jack still wants to catch Hannibal, desperately so. He locks Will in a hospital, waiting for Hannibal to come take what's his, and it is not just any hospital, oh no. It is the exact hospital where Hannibal worked as an ER surgeon all those years ago. Will has to admit that it is a ballsy move. Hannibal will definitely know the ins and outs of this place, but a lot of the staff could potentially recognize him, and with his past out in the public eye, trying to break in or out would be a nightmare. To make matters worse, Hannibal would not only have to achieve both of these things, but smuggle a recovering Will out with him who, as far as the FBI are concerned, would be going against his will. Too bad that they do not know that Hannibal will not be coming. The doll was more than enough evidence of that. Hannibal wanted him to know that he had found Will and then discarded him, giving back the most important tangible gift Will had given him. Now he is stuck in purgatory, waiting for an event that is not going to happen.

Will spends most of his time in silence. He has no one to talk to even if he wants to since Mathilde disappeared off the face of the Earth, but he is perfectly content to spend his days within his mind palace. Even his good friend Jack dares not grace him with his presence. The days are lonely, but he is used to it; he was lonely for a long time, so the routine is easy to fall back into, at least at first. The last time he was imprisoned in this way was at the BSHCI after his first time being diagnosed with encephalitis, but he was not in love then. The deep ache that emanates within his chest grows with each passing day, consuming him whole, and there is no escape. The voice in his head is no longer his, the words melding into the deep timbre of Hannibal's voice. The knowledge that the last thing he said to Hannibal was that he deserved suffering weighs on him like an iron ball. Now Hannibal wants nothing to do with him, and it is entirely his fault. We are alone without each other. Will walks through the halls of his memory palace, reminiscing on all the things he won't be able to have again. He touches the oak frame of their bed, tastes the freshly baked bread, smells the earthy soap in the kitchen, hears the piano music emanating from Hannibal's study, and sees Hannibal, sitting in the tufted chair in their living room, slate grey dress shirt contrasting the deep red of the fabric. He smiles up from his sketchbook, beaming at Will. Will cannot see the drawing from this angle, but he knows that it is a portrait of him. He has caught Hannibal staring at

him while holding his notebook so many times that it has become expected, routine even. Will would give the world for it to be routine once more.

He falls asleep to be accosted with the feeling of drowning. The water is everywhere, in his eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. He chokes, swallowing great gouts of the brine-filled liquid. The cold is piercing. His skin tingles, icy shards piercing every inch of him. He kicks with all his strength, trying to break free, but the water is rising faster and faster and faster. He feels dizzy from the strain, his muscles finally running out of oxygen. Will floats there, dead weight in the sea of water, waiting for death to claim him.

The cold of the dream follows Will into the waking world. The thin blanket courtesy of the hospital does not quelm his shivering. He is about to find someone and ask for a cup of warm water, anything to banish the chill from his bones, when he notices an envelope and a slice of apple pie on the table beside his bed. He looks at the clock. Six in the morning. It is a bit early for breakfast, let alone apple pie. The letter is sealed, but he makes out his name in the loopy handwritten font on the envelope. He does not recognize the hand, but it is reminiscent of something. The slight scratchy quality is a far cry from Hannibal's sloping penmanship, but it has its own allure to it. It feels homey, safe. Will realizes that his analysis of the handwriting is a bit pointless since the person who wrote it probably signed their name at the bottom, saving him the trouble of deducing it himself. He tears the envelope open as quietly as possible, although it is audible anyway due to the silence in the room. Carefully unfolding the page, he begins to read.

Dear Will,

My recovery has been slow going, but that is to be expected with being pushed out a window. You know they call it defenestration? Like something out of a historical drama, not the fate I would imagine for myself. I would like to send my love and best wishes to you for a full recovery. My physical therapist says I probably won't be able to walk again, but I feel determined to prove him wrong. Actually, I heard you were in physical therapy too, and I hope you're able to get where you need to. Someone like you has been through a lot, so I wanted to give you something to celebrate. I hope you trust me to pick the right kind.

Sincerely, Alana Bloom

A feeling of dread comes over him because at first glance, the letter is perfectly normal, but to him, the letter is the biggest red flag he has ever seen in his life. He knows Alana's handwriting, how could he not? He has seen it dozens of times, but this is not her penmanship. What makes him truly uneasy is that the handwriting is actually very similar to hers, and to an untrained eye, it would pass a cursory glance, but his eye is anything but untrained. The curve of the vowels is slightly off. Alana's lines always touch, leaving no gaps in o's, e's, and a's, but there are gaps galore in these vowels. Not only this, but how would Alana even know that he is in physical therapy? Why would she reach out now of all times? He has been lucid for weeks and here for months before that. Then there's the mention of apple pie. The only people that know how much he likes apple pie are his father and–

"Oh my God," he breathes, quickly covering his mouth as soon as he realizes the mistake. Thinking quickly, he adds. "Oh, it's just a piece of lint, not a spider." Hopefully the FBI believes that Will Graham is scared of spiders and that seeing one would trigger him to talk aloud to himself. Nonetheless, there is nothing he can do now, so he reverts his attention back to the letter. Now that he knows it is from Hannibal, he is looking for a code or secret message because surely it is not JUST a letter. He takes note of the first letter of each sentence: "my", "you", "like", "I", "my", "actually", "someone", "I", "sincerely". **MYLIMASIS**. To anybody else, it would be a random combination of letters, hardly worth noting, but to Will it is the single best thing he could receive. Hannibal forgives him. Anticipation courses through him, and he scrutinizes the letter further. The mention of physical therapy and the slightly ominous "I hope you're able to get where you need to" are quite obvious now that he is looking. Hannibal is asking him if he is ready to run, and his answer is a resounding yes. But how can he communicate this? Will has no way of knowing where Hannibal even is, much less how he can slip a message to him. Slightly deflated, he keeps reading. Of course. The slice of apple pie. "I hope you trust me." Relying on trusting Hannibal Lecter is a dangerous position to find oneself in, but Will has been acquainted with the practice more than any living person. Of course he trusts Hannibal, even if he has no idea what the plan is.

He reaches for the slice, eating it quickly. Yes, he is ready to run, and yes, he trusts Hannibal. The pie is good. He has not had any good food in the weeks since waking up, so any change is more than welcome. He finishes the last forkfull, half expecting something to happen. When nothing does, he chides himself for thinking that Hannibal can act so quickly. He needs time, and Will has all the time in the world. He eyes the cup of water on his nightstand and spills it on the letter for good measure. Pretending to be frustrated, he attempts to dry the letter with the hem of his shirt, managing to smudge the ink to the point of it being partially illegible. Audibly grumbling to himself, he crumples the wad of paper and places it on the plate. Someone will be here to take it soon, and they will throw it away without anyone paying it a second thought. His prediction holds true, so now all he can do is wait.

Chapter End Notes

Ahhh I can finally say that Will has a relapse of encephalitis and is hallucinating all over the place! I keep forgetting that you guys didn't know, so I just about cried when I read the comments because I felt bad. I was really worried that I was including either too much or too little foreshadowing, so I hope that it was just enough that you can look back and think "ohhhhhhhhhh".

To clarify, the whole thing with Mattia was a hallucination. With his brain bogged down with the encephalitis, so most of what Mattia was telling him were his own insecurities and suspicions based on the day's activities.

Drawings of Stars Around Your Scars

Chapter Notes

Yesterday we had sad Will hours, now we have absolutely devastated Hannibal hours

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal watches as Will storms out of the foyer, taking the knife with him. He can feel Will's anger radiating off of him as he walks, his gait purposeful, but there is a certain heaviness to it. To follow Will now would be disastrous, like poking a wounded tiger, and Hannibal has no intention of antagonizing Will past this point. This confrontation was inevitable, he knows, but the consequences will ripple, blurring the stability of their future together. Will needed to be pushed over the edge. He is a brilliant flame burning in the surrounding darkness, giving off a blinding light and casting shadows, but the fire in him must be cultivated, stabilized. With him there is a fine line between far too much and far too little, and toeing it requires skill. Will's flight here is dangerous. He could completely shut down, ruining the progress they have achieved thus far, but Hannibal cannot go to him because Will must process this on his own. His mind is so beautiful, associations forming like an intricate web of connections with no forts to retreat to.

Hannibal strolls to the study, quickly finding the bag of medical supplies he always keeps in case situations such as this one arise. There has always been blood between him and Will, and he feels disillusioned that he would think that it was all behind them. The wound itself is not deep because that was not the intent behind it. It is a statement, a show of power above all else. He picks some gauze out of the kit, pouring a fraction of the antiseptic solution onto it, dabbing the blood away. The blood begins to clot, and the gauze is stained pink as the solution dilutes it. The cut is unlikely to scar, and if it does it should be barely noticeable unless someone is looking for it. With the flow of blood staunched, he decides to leave the wound open to the air, no need for bandages. He replaces the kit in the bag after making sure it is still well-stocked for any emergency, and leaves the room. He suspects Will is in his workshop, so he decides to go on a walk outside, wanting to give Will space and the opportunity to come back to the house if he so wishes.

The leaves are long gone, leaving the tree branches bare. Hannibal cannot wait for spring so that he can watch the orchard transform with blooming flowers. There is rarely snow in this area of rural Italy, which he is silently grateful for. Part of why he chose Baltimore all those years ago was because of the general lack of harsh winters. Not that it matters, he will always be warm now if he so wishes, but the aversion towards the cold has remained with him. Spring is a beacon of new life, but it is also a symbol of survival and perseverance, a reward for surviving the winter. Hannibal has survived many winters and been rewarded with many springs, but this is the first time that the new season holds so many unknowns. From almost as long as he can remember, he has been alone in this world, feeling as if everyone else is stumbling around blindly, until he met Will. Life had not been kind to Will, but Hannibal is

also not a stranger to her cruelty. Will hides it well, and most people would be too distracted by Will's other quirks to notice, but Hannibal is not like most other people. He notices how Will avoids changing his shirt in front of him, how he evades the topic of his father.

One time, Will had fallen asleep in his arms, and Hannibal was running his hands over his back. He never said anything when he felt the subtle knots of scar tissue on Will's back, but the marks were unmistakably shaped like the end of a belt buckle. There were dozens such marks strewn across Will's back, many of them faded over time and stretched as Will grew. He had been a child. He had wiped his eyes then, forcing himself to steady his breathing lest he wake Will. The peace on Will's face was precious because of how rare it was. Will had been tormented by a lifetime's worth of demons before his middle age, and Hannibal had contributed to those scars. Some scars never bleed in the first place, creating pitfalls in the recesses of the mind instead. Hannibal never mentioned his discovery, forcing himself not to let his fingers linger on the marks. Will would tell him when he was ready, and when he was, Hannibal would listen.

Listening to the soft crunch of the chilled detritus littering the ground beneath his feet, he passes the oldest oak on their property, wondering if he would have done anything differently if he had the knowledge of today when he first laid eyes on Will. He is content beyond belief with their life now, but was it worth the pain to get here? He would always answer yes, but would Will? They had both sustained scars at the other's hand, both mental and physical. Love for them was complicated, and in some ways it always will be. The darkness within both of them will fester, aching to be let out into the world. Hannibal has long since contained it, bending it to his will, elevating uglines into art. Will has conquered his too, but in a different way. He beat it down, forcing it away into the depths of his soul where it slowly began to consume him. Hannibal untied the ropes binding it, unleashing it into the world. Will had been suffocating beneath it, and now he has time to learn to breathe without it.

There is a slight chill whisking through the air, and it feels dry on his skin. His absent-minded wandering has delivered him to the edge of the orchard, close by to the outside road. Hannibal allows his eyes to wander, taking in the atmosphere surrounding him when he notices a shape on the ground. Upon further inspection he recognizes that it is a man, probably drunk and having wandered in from the outside and gotten lost. If the man is drunk, it would be best to simply leave him there until he wakes up and is able to orient himself. The winter air is not cold enough to be a danger, even if the man does not have a coat. His brow furrows at this observation. The absence of a coat is not entirely unusual during this time of year, but it catches his attention, so he walks toward the crumpled mass, stopping dead in his tracks a few steps away. A flash of genuine fear rises within him. He would know those curls anywhere.

"Will?" he practically shouts, urgency evident in his step as he kneels next to the man on the ground. He is breathing, but there is no response. The awkward angle of Will's legs suggests he fell from a height. Looking up, Hannibal sees a tree with branches low enough to climb. Had Will fallen from the tree? Hannibal springs into action, checking Will's head for trauma, and taking a general assessment of any other injuries. Will's head shows no signs of outward damage, and the swelling of his ankles and knees along with the bruises speckled across his legs suggest that Will's legs broke his fall. By some stroke of luck, nothing appears to be broken. Hannibal breathes in deeply, he needs to be calm, clinical if he intends to be of any

use to Will. He checks Will's pulse. It is high, but not significant enough to be worrisome yet. He fishes Will's phone out of his pocket, and turns the flashlight on. It is not ideal, but time is of the essence. He opens Will's eyes, checking to see if the pupils dilate. Nothing. This does not bode well, and Hannibal stifles a cry as he considers the possibilities. He places the back of his hand on Will's forehead, taking the younger man's temperature. It is high.

I tend to run hot.

Everything begins to fall into place then. Will is having a relapse of encephalitis, and for all the scenarios Hannibal is prepared for, this is not one of them. He curses himself for not considering the possibility, for letting himself believe that they could have something together. Will is in a coma as a result of a relapse in autoimmune encephalitis. If it was viral, he could treat it with antivirals and time, but fate has no mercy for the wretched. Will's immune system will continue attacking his body, taking bits of Will with it until there is nothing left but an empty husk of what once was. Hannibal needs time to think, to consider his options. He plucks Will's body off of the ground, tucking his head against his chest, and carries him back to the house.

The rooms feel unwelcoming, hostile even, as if a dark cloud suddenly enveloped everything that was once bright and jovial. Hannibal sets Will down in their shared bed, tucking him in beneath the blankets. He is afraid to leave Will's side, terrified that the man will stop breathing. What if he does? They do not have a respirator or any other equipment he would need. Would Will even want to be resuscitated? They never talked about this, about anything, stupidly thinking that they would have time, and now they do not. His ruminations hang in the air like a heavy fog.

He decides that if Will dies in the time it takes him to fetch the medical bag from his study, there was not much chance in the first place. Steeling himself, he gives a gentle squeeze to Will's hand and strides out of the room, forcing himself not to run. His fingers rifle through the supplies with practiced ease, muscle memory the only thing keeping him steady. He loads a travel bag with saline, components for an IV, antibiotics, and a catheter. Will will be embarrassed, but if Hannibal has to choose between Will's body being able to excrete toxins and Will being flustered if he wakes up, he will pick the former every time. His heart flutters as he re-enters the room, relief washing over him when he sees the steady rise and fall of Will's chest. He gets to work administering the various supplies, forcing his hands to stop shaking. There is a reason the hospital does not let staff treat family members or close colleagues, and this is exactly why.

Hannibal needs to make a decision. He could take Will to the hospital. Drive out to a different city, leave him next to the ER, and hope for the best. Will would most likely live, but what would happen to them? Although Will is the less famous between them, he is still recognizable and does not speak Italian. He is sure someone there has to speak English, but the mere fact that Will is a foreigner would draw unwanted attention. Hannibal had false identification made for them, but it would not hold up to any advanced levels of scrutiny. Not to mention what Will would think, waking up in a foreign place by himself, with no

recollection as to how he got there. Amnesia is common with encephalitis, so would he even remember the last few months? Years? The idea of it makes his heart ache.

Hannibal drags one of the chairs from the end of the room closer to the bed so that he can hold Will's hand. Even in sleep Will looks ethereal, the soft golden beams of sunlight illuminating his face. He intertwines his fingers in Will's, pressing into the small divot at the base of his wrist below the carpal bones. The pulse there is slightly elevated, but steady. He dares not ponder what would happen if it stopped, what he would become. The setting sun gives the illusion that Will's skin is on fire, which is not far from the truth. He is burning up with fever and a light sheen coats his brow. Hannibal hopes that the coma at least grants some relief from the discomfort, but Will's face contorts into a pained expression, breaking the illusion of peaceful sleep. His fingers curl inward and grip onto Hannibal's hand, proving that the neurological functioning of his sympathetic nervous system is not impaired. It is a good sign, but the rapid progression of the illness worries him. He considers the signs he must have missed, but there is almost nothing. Will had occasional bouts of nausea, but he often attributed them to an upset stomach or something other. Had Will been hiding the symptoms, knowing that there was nothing they could do? The thought is too dismal to consider.

Realizing that neither of them had eaten anything aside from breakfast, Hannibal considers making dinner for himself. The prospect is unpleasant, but he has to eat if they are both to get through this. Unable to gather the conviction to cook something proper, he pieces together a haphazard sandwich, not particularly caring about the end result. Normally, such disregard for etiquette would appall him, and anyone who saw him would shake him by the shoulders demanding to know what he had done to the real Hannibal Lecter, but he has no desire to eat. He struggles finishing the small portion and quickly finishes the few dishes so that he can return to Will's side. He considers sleeping in another room to give Will space, but he rejects the thought of leaving Will for so long immediately. If Will stops breathing during the night at least he Will be there. He throws his pajamas on, not caring which ones he grabs from the drawer. They are probably red. He goes to the spare room to fetch an extra duvet because he does not want to disturb Will, who is currently cocooned beneath the one they share. The memory of choosing these duvets resurfaces, practically forgotten as it was so long ago. It was a sunny day, not exactly a rarity for southern Italy even in winter, but pleasant nonetheless. They are handmade with goose down stuffed into individual quilted chambers. The body of the duvets is a cotton blend, breathable and warm, but the most striking is the red embroidery along the edges, a stark contrast to the cream fabric.

Hannibal turns the lights out, laying down on his side of the bed, Will's limp body a heavy weight on the opposite end. He feels as if the man will disappear, leaving an all-encompassing black hole in his wake, swallowing everything in its proximity. It is still early to sleep, but he cannot fathom occupying any other place. He peers at the ceiling, tracing patterns in the darkness that are never actually there. Maybe if he stares long enough, the darkness will begin to stare back. A voice sounds, ringing deep in his ears. He lifts his head in an attempt to find the source, surmising that he must have gone insane only to realize that it is his voice calling out Will's name.

"Will," he utters into the empty air. Before he can know it, he is recounting an old story, one he told Mischa so many decades ago. "I'm going to tell you about Lady Wanda the Brave, Will. A long time ago, there was a great king named Vytautas. Like all things that are great,

his reign came to an end upon his death. The throne went to his firstborn and namesake, but his youngest son was jealous. He stabbed his brother to death in cold blood with Vytautas's own blade. The people were horrified at the betrayal and banished the youngest son, appointing the elder Vytautas's only daughter to the throne. Princess Wanda ruled fairly, treating every man and woman with respect, wealthy and poor alike. Many spoke of her kindness, but another of Wanda's greatest strengths was her wit. She brought the kingdom to prosperity, earning the love and adoration of all her subjects."

"Word of her success spread across the many kingdoms, and countless suitors came to her halls asking for her hand in marriage, offering all the riches the world could offer, but Wanda refused. The princess held that she would not deliver Lithuania into the hands of a foreigner as long as she lived. Months went by, and each suitor left the castle as disappointed as the last, until one day a man named Rydier called upon her. The man was German, a prince by blood, and a warrior of his own merit. His land was claimed by blood and his skill with the sword. Wanda detested him, seeing him for what he was: a corrupt and power-hungry individual who ruled with fear. She refused his offer, abiding by her vow not to allow a foreigner to have the throne. Rydier saw red and sent his army to deliver his threat, claiming that if Wanda did not agree to his hand in marriage, he would invade her kingdom, burning the villages and massacring her people."

"The princess held firm, refusing to take Rydier as a husband. As his army began to amass on the border, the people grew fearful. They begged their Princess to reconsider, if only to save their lives, but Wanda refused. Those that saw her would say she kept to herself, a mournful expression written on her face. She grew more somber with each passing day, until finally the month was almost up. Rydier was preparing for war, and it would be a complete massacre. One frigid night, Wanda krept down the steps of her chambers, past the royal guards, and towards the edge of the castle grounds. She stepped onto the precipice overlooking the churning river below, lowering the hood of her cloak. She felt the cold wind upon her face one final time and jumped into the icy embrace of the estuary. A fisherman recovered her body the following day. Rydier called off his army upon hearing the news, realizing his mistake. Wanda's people cried for her, mourning the loss of their princess. Thus she earned the title of Lady Wanda the Brave, for she gave her life to save her country," Hannibal finishes.

He does not know why he is telling Will the story if he cannot hear Hannibal. Maybe he is not doing it for Will, but for himself. This was Mischa's favorite tale. As a boy, he never understood why she loved such a sad story, but now he appreciates the elegance of it. Perhaps something stood out to her, even as a child. The memory of Mischa raises a lump in his throat, the combined weight of her death and Will barely clinging onto life less than a foot beside him are too much. He wants to crawl out of his skin, to peel it off and wear somebody else's, even if only for a day.

"Do not take him from me. You already have her. Please, leave him to me. Please." He recites the words over and over to no one in particular.

Hannibal attempts to sleep and fails miserably. The action is much more akin to resting his eyes and lightly dozing, torn from this state with every hitch in Will's breath and every twitch of his limbs. Towards the middle of the night, Will begins to sweat profusely, his hair sticking

to his forehead. His face contorts in awkward angles, as if he is in immense pain. Hannibal is instantly by his side, practically tearing out of bed to apply a cold compress to his forehead, wiping the sweat away. Will begins to shiver, his body convulsing slightly with the force of it. Hannibal buries his face in his hands, distraught. Will is deteriorating rapidly, and it is becoming abundantly clear that he will die without proper medical care.

Hannibal makes the impossible decision to take Will to the hospital. They may not be together, given all of the unknowns in this situation, but at least Will will live. They will find each other somehow.

His mind made up, Hannibal erupts into action. He finds Will's wallet and puts it into his back pocket, making sure the fake ID can be easily found. Removing the IV and catheter is a quick process, and he stuffs Will into the back of their car as discreetly as possible. It would be difficult to explain to his neighbors why he is putting an inert body wrapped in blankets into the back of his car in the middle of the night, and it is a complication he is unwilling to risk. The drive to Palermo will take the rest of the night, and he is relying on the cover of darkness to hide Will from prying eyes. He is about to turn the key in the ignition when his hand wavers, and he hastily runs back to their bedroom, returning with the carved doll Will had given him their first month here.

Chapter End Notes

The story Hannibal tells Will is a very well known Polish legend. The original is entitled "O Dzielnej Wandzie," and I translated it for the purpose of the story. I did have to leave a few things out because they are specific to Poland, but I tried to keep most of it. For example, Wanda jumps into the Wisla river, which is a very significant feature of Polish geography, but would not make sense in the context of my story. The late king's name was originally "Krak", for the city Krakówẅ, but I changed it to the Lithuanian "Vytautas". Poland and Lithuania have a lot of shared history, so I would not be surprised if they have a similar version of the same story.

I do have to apologize because the next chapter is most likely going to be a bit late. I will still post it on Saturday, but it might be a few hours after the usual time. I want to sleep in a bit since it is the weekend, and if I'm being entirely honest, the amount of medical research I need to do for that chapter is really kicking my ass lol.

When the Scale Tips, Part 1

Chapter Notes

> Chapter 7 ended up being extremely long (over six thousand words), and I was not even finished with it. I wanted to post something tomorrow, so I decided to split it up into two parts and then finish the rest of it in the following chapter. I feel bad for posting only part of it, but I need more time to tidy some things up, so this is the compromise. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is woken up by the sound of footsteps and crinkling plastic. Groggily pushing the sleep from his eyes, he sits up to see a young woman–a nurse by the look of her scrubs–opening the blinds in his room. Will has never seen her before; she must be a new addition to the rotation. Her straight blonde hair is tied up in a ponytail, a few strands falling onto her forehead. She has such a cheerful smile he cannot help but smile back. There is a certain youthful innocence to her, and Will truly hopes that the world does not take it from her just yet.

"Up and at 'em!" she sounds, her voice sweet and kind like the rest of her. Will grins even wider. This visit is definitely unusual as he almost never receives visitors anymore, medical staff or other, but she is also new, so it is possible there was a mistake, or maybe she is simply visiting patients and has not been informed to avoid his room yet.

"Alright Bill, time for your medicine!" she croons. Will is about to open his mouth to say that he is in fact not Bill but Will and that he is not on any medication anymore, but then he remembers the letter. Do you trust me? Yes. She never specifies which medication he is supposed to be receiving, but he does not dare ask in case the FBI is still listening. The metallic vase has not moved since he first woke up here, and he is not willing to take any chances. Whatever it is, he really hopes that Hannibal is not trying to kill him this time. It would be peak Hannibal-esque levels of pettiness if he actually waited this long just to take Will out by proxy via unnecessary medication.

Will scans the nurse's scrubs in search of a name tag. Even if he is not going to say her name out loud, he dislikes calling her "the nurse" in his head. It feels disrespectful, dehumanizing. She reminds him a little of Miriam Lass, he discerns with slight apprehension. She of course is not actually Miriam Lass, but the resemblance is there. Not Miriam returns to the tray she brought with her and uncaps a small syringe. Will watches as she pulls the plunger up, siphoning the liquid into the body of the syringe from the small glass vial. The vial itself is unremarkable and the liquid clear, much like any medication. Not Miriam expertly taps the side of the syringe, dissipating the bubbles with practiced ease and setting it back down on the tray. She rolls up the sleeve on his left arm and cleans a small area of skin with an alcohol wipe. After discarding the waste on the tray, she quickly sticks the needle into his arm. Not

Miriam certainly knows what she is doing because Will barely feels the poke. A rush of cold floods the surrounding area, creating a feeling of icy numbness, and he hopes that it is a side effect of the injection instead of an allergic reaction. Not Miriam begins to move quickly around the room, placing all of the waste on her tray and quickly taking his vitals. She hands him a tray with a covered carton bowl.

"Eat up!" she encourages cheerfully. Breakfast this early is unusual, but then again everything about this day is unusual, so he does not question it.

"Thanks," he replies, putting on his best expression of gratitude. Will watches her ponytail sway slightly as she leaves the room, curiosity stirring within him. He looks down at the tray, realizing that he may as well eat even if only to kill time. The weeks of waiting have worn on him, and he finds himself restless in anticipation. The inability to communicate worries him because he cannot be sure what exactly the plan is. He can only hope that Hannibal has considered all the necessary details and planned for any complications. He undoes the tinfoil, curious what concoction the kitchen came up with this time, to find that the bowl is empty. There is some residue of what must have been various breakfast foods, but nothing substantial. His brow furrows in confusion. Has someone eaten his food? The idea is ridiculous and he chuckles quietly to himself. He needs to think about this rationally, but everything to do with Hannibal is almost always entirely irrational. Hannibal tends to pick the most convoluted option available whenever he wants to accomplish something, and the worst part is that it usually works. Framing Chilton would have worked perfectly had Hannibal not been so invested in Will, tearing his defenses down only for Will to betray him.

Will ponders the situation with Chilton and the Chesapeake Ripper. Hannibal had been impossible to catch, at least until Will came along, but it was not only because he had no traceable motive and left no evidence. No, Hannibal Lecter loves to plan for every contingency. After all, he had been framing Chilton for murder long before he ever laid eyes on Will. This is a man with practically unlimited resources at his disposal and an insurmountable amount of steadfastness. Hannibal is the most stubborn person he has ever met, after himself, and he envisions that Hannibal will have planned for as many scenarios as possible. The FBI may think that they have successfully guarded the hospital against Hannibal, but they do not know the man as Will does. The only thing he has never been able to truly predict is Will, and Will has no intention of getting in the way of the operation. He feels reassured, the knowledge that he will not be trapped here for much longer spurring him on.

Despite the comfort of his newfound confidence, the minutes drag on endlessly. He has looked at the clock on the table by his bed at least four times in the last ten minutes, and it seems to be moving slower and slower. Usually, he has no issue thinking the hours of the day away, sorting through memories in his memory palace, but he feels antsy, as if his skin carries an electric charge. The feeling is exactly the same as when he took the taxi to Hannibal's house in Baltimore, but now he is even more helpless than before.
He realizes with more than a little dismay that while he feels helpless now, he may–no he will–be forced to act. The restless anticipation will turn into action and he will have no choice because this is no longer a game of cat and mouse, it is life and death. Freedom is not earned, it is taken, and he will have to take it. It is also not solely his life either, but Hannibal's as well. He already vowed to burn the world to the ground if it meant he could

have Hannibal by his side, but that was when the world did not see the shadow that resides within his soul. He was ready to give everything, but only now does he recognize that he will give something far more valuable than he ever gave credence to. His absolution. Currently he exists in a limbo, a purgatory constructed by Jack Crawford, where he is shielded from the world's judgment in exchange for part of his freedom, but when the scale tips and the glass shatters, his absolution will be renounced.

Will conjures up all the memories of Hannibal he can immediately think of in an attempt to soothe the growing ache within his chest. Soon, he thinks. The image of Hannibal ripples, black water ripping through it, and a new likeness appears. It is Hannibal, lying motionless on the floor of his kitchen, covered in his own blood from head to toe. The specter accosts Will, wrenching him from his introspection, and he takes a deep breath, rubbing the horrific picture out of his eyes with the palms of his hands. He tries to close his eyes and imagine the trees surrounding their house, the reds of the leaves that match Hannibal's eyes, the smell of leaves that permeated the air, the grit of the ground beneath his feet, but the memory slips through his fingers. The jittery feeling continues, and the awareness that he is experiencing an anxiety attack strikes him. His heart rate has increased significantly, his hands are shaky, and he is sweating profusely. He tries to decrease his breathing, counting seconds between each inhale and exhale to no avail. He knows panicking will only make it worse, but the experience is so reminiscent of his childhood that he cannot help it. The black water rises beneath his feet. He is choking, a rush of liquid enters his lungs and prevents him from inhaling. His nose and mouth are on fire as he claws at them, desperation rising within him. He is about to call out for someone, anyone, to help him, but his body goes rigid and his eyes roll back into his head, closing him away from the light of the world once again as he falls into the embrace of the frigid water.

Will Graham seizes for a full minute before anyone notices.

The price of Jack Crawford putting Will in the most secluded private room is that he is difficult to monitor. The whole situation is unorthodox, and Mathilde hates it when the government gets in the way of her treating a patient. She knows that some medical professionals dislike treating criminals, but to her medicine has always been medicine. If she can save someone's life, she will be damned if she doesn't do her job, and Will Graham is not an exception. She does not know why the FBI is so concerned with Will. If he is actually dangerous, they would have taken him away by now and locked him away. By all accounts, he is well past recovery and should have been discharged weeks ago, but yet here he is. There is nothing to be done for him that cannot be supplied by the clinic or an outpatient service.

She was not surprised when the hospital removed Will from her rotations after he grabbed her. While she did not report it at the time, she could never shake the feeling that someone had been watching them, scrutinizing the interaction. In the moment when it happened, she was absolutely terrified, not because she was afraid of what he would do to her, but of what he would ask of her. She originally planned to refuse, for both her safety and his, but the hurt

in his eyes made her heart ache. This whole thing was unfair for him. They had not told him anything, and she had seen Jack Crawford in his room within two hours of the first time he woke up, questioning him. She hates how so often the law treats people like Will as if they are not human. She always believed in the adage "innocent until proven guilty", but even people who are guilty deserve to be treated with basic decency and care, otherwise society is no better than they are. Why could they not wait another day? He had been in a coma for months, battling one of the worst relapses of encephalitis she had ever treated, and they could not give him the day to breathe. So she told him. The second the words left her mouth she watched his face flicker through a hundred separate emotions all at once. Why the mere mention of Johns Hopkins Hospital would provoke such an overpowering dam of emotion in the man is beyond her, but she would not change anything about how she acted that day. They have not reprimanded her officially, but she did receive instructions that Will is no longer her patient and to avoid his room unless absolutely necessary.

Mathilde sorts through her charts, recording notes on all of her patients and absent-mindedly twirling one of her curls around her finger. While most people say it is a tiresome job, she secretly adores it. Seeing patients is her favorite part of the day, but the charts show her the evidence of how far so many of them have come. There is pride mixed in with her other feelings, but the main emotion she always feels is happiness that her patients are improving. She carefully finishes her final notes, making sure that each file is arranged in its proper order and beginning her morning rounds. She is on the cusp of rounding the corner to visit her first patient when she risks a brief look into Will's room to find the man violently convulsing in his bed. Hurriedly tying her unruly curls back, Mathilde rushes to the PA system and punches in the numbers she knows all too well.

"Code blue!" she yells into the speaker, steeling herself for the pandemonium that is surely to come. Will is not her patient anymore, but he has as much a right to treatment as anybody, and a tonic-clonic seizure is no exception to that.

The crash team arrives just as she finishes turning on the heart monitor.

"Tonic-clonic seizure. Heart rate is stable. He has a history of encephalitis and has had previous episodes," she recites to the attending physician on duty, Dr. Maurin.

"Push 200 mg of phenobarbital," answers the woman, taking Mathilde's history in stride. Mathilde likes Dr. Maurin. Although she is shorter than most of her fellow attending physicians, she can command a room filled with people effortlessly. She stands her ground and advocates for her patients, but she also is unafraid of taking advice from nurses and her subordinates despite her decades of experience. The room erupts into a blur of movement, a needle prodding Will's arm since they removed the IV weeks ago. Mathilde checks his pupils.

"Pupils are unresponsive," she states, directing her words to Dr. Maurin.

"We should intubate and get him to the ICU," directs the doctor. "If he has a history there's a high chance it'll happen again." The team follows her orders, quickly attaching Will's chart to the bed and wheeling it out of the room.

Once in the ICU, Will is transferred over to the care of the ICU nurses. Mathilde is the last to leave, ensuring that they know his history and the medications he received in the last few

minutes. Her hair has managed to come undone somehow, the hair tie she was using nowhere to be found. One of the nurses, a man just under six feet tall with pronounced bags under his eyes, assures her that she can go.

"I will take care of him," he says, smiling through the heaviness in his eyes. He brushes away the hair that falls in his face only for it to fall back almost immediately. She nods, blinking her eyes a few times. There is something unsettling about the man, a sharpness to his face that she cannot quite place. She shakes her head, banishing the thought. He is just tired, she tells herself. Working in the ICU is a special kind of sleep deprivation, and she does not envy him for a second. Just as she turns toward the door to leave, Dr. Maurin steps into view, nodding at the man to fill her in on everything.

The man flips through the chart, frowning slightly.

"It is a possibility that he is in hypoglycemic shock, if the dosage of insulin he received this morning was incorrect–" Mathilde cuts him off, stepping closer to the bed.

"He's not a diabetic, why would he be getting insulin?" she interjects, frowning. The man peers at her from behind his mask with a look of utter confusion. He glances back at the chart, eyes squinting slightly.

"William Gardner, 46, type one diabetic with a history of Grand Mal seizures, in recovery for hip surgery, 3 weeks post-op." This can not be happening. She stares at the man, he stares back. Dr. Maurin raises both her eyebrows questioningly.

"Was he your patient?" she asks calmly.

"Yes!" Mathilde practically bellows, wincing at the unprofessional outburst. "Sorry. I meant that yes, I treated him a few weeks ago until he was removed from my rotation. His name is William Graham, and he was hospitalized for a relapse in anti-NMDA receptor encephalitis." She notices Dr. Maurin twitch barely perceptibly at the mention of Will's removal from her rotation, pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose to hide the fact.

"And why were you removed?" the doctor prompts. Mathilde lowers her head, a cold sweat creeping up her spine, but the calm in Dr. Maurin's voice reassures her. This is not a hearing where Mathilde will be sentenced for any crimes, Dr. Maurin merely needs to know for the sake of the patient.

"I do not know anything officially, this is only speculation," she announces sheepishly. She continues when Dr. Maurin dips her chin slightly, urging her to continue. "I told him where he was. I think the FBI wants something with him. Jack Crawford was in his room, berating him for God knows what. They would not even give him a day after waking up to recover," she finishes sadly. The other nurse shakes his head in solidarity. Maybe the man is not so bad after all. A memory sparks in the back of her mind, so she quickly adds, "In the beginning when he was still actually recovering, he often talked in his sleep. He was always muttering under his breath about honey or something like that. I'm sorry," she shakes her head. "I don't know why that seemed important." She looks up again and there is something in the nurse's eyes, the whisper of a wet gleam on his eyelashes that puzzles her.

"I'm going to trust you, nurse Mathilde," says Dr. Maurin carefully, "but be warned that I never give my trust lightly, and that once it is lost it is almost impossible to gain it back," she smiles sincerely and turns to the other nurse. "The chart says he is three weeks post-op major hip surgery. Is he?" The man checks both sides for evidence of stitches or at least scarring, but there is nothing there. Satisfied, Dr. Maurin directs her attention to him fully. "Now, administer one mg of glucagon. I am going to notify admin of this mix-up" Mathilde knows a dismissal when she sees one, so she turns on her heel to actually leave the ICU this time.

Chapter End Notes

I originally was not planning on having any major original characters in this fic (then again, it was also originally supposed to be <5k lmao), but it got away from me so now we have Mathilde and Dr. Maurin!

I'm still working on character descriptions as far as physical descriptions, and I do acknowledge that they are pretty lacking here, so I did want to share that my inspiration for Dr. Maurin is Ming-Na Wen, and my inspiration for Mathilde is Sarah-Nicole Robles.

When The Scale Tips, Part 2

Chapter Notes

Lets pretend that ICU nurses all wear masks, thanks :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes up to the harsh light clinic light once again. The feeling that his body belongs to him slowly returns, spreading through his extremities, only for him to be greeted with a profound soreness in his throat. He attempts to speak, finding that apparently vocal cord function is not considered a priority by his awakening body. He turns his head slightly to see a nurse reaching over him to remove what must be an endotracheal tube from his throat. Will meets the man's gaze and watches as the corners around his eyes crease in a smile hidden behind the mask. Still blinking away his own tiredness, Will takes in the sunken quality of his under eyes, the gaunt look of his cheekbones, and the overall drained disposition of the man. After replacing the concoction of various tubes, the nurse turns back to him, eyes boring into him with such an intensity that Will is about to ask what his problem is, but then he looks closer and his jaw drops. The transformation is subtle yet extraordinarily effective.

"Hello, mylimasis," Hannibal whispers, running his fingers through Will's hair, gently caressing his temple with his thumb. "I am truly sorry for doing this to you, my love," he continues, gesturing at their surroundings, "but it was the only way. They are watching your room." Will does not need to think twice about who Hannibal is referring to, so he just nods, rendered speechless by Hannibal's presence. "Your nurse, Mathilde if I recall correctly, was telling me all about how you were talking in your sleep," Hannibal smiles impishly, still concealed behind the mask.

"Hopefully nothing too embarrassing," Will groans in response, his voice still hoarse from the breathing tube as he tries to sit up.

"On the contrary, it was entirely damning." Hannibal steps closer to push him back down on the bed, making gentle shushing sounds as he smooths the palms of his hands over Will's shoulders. Will raises an eyebrow in question and he feels as if he is using a disproportionate amount of energy compared to what he is asking of his body. It is probably in his best interest to lie down for the time being. Hannibal is practically purring in delight now, and Will wonders what on Earth he could have said to make him act so strangely.

"Apparently, your barely intelligible muttering consisted mainly of the word 'honey', as retold by our lovely nurse Mathilde, but I have my own hypothesis as to what it is you were actually saying." Will's cheeks redden in embarrassment, and he shakes his head.

"I thought you left me," he admits, unwilling to look Hannibal in the eyes. The older man's face falls almost instantaneously.

"Oh, Will. Did you not find the doll? Did they take it from you?" he asks, voice wavering slightly.

"I got it. Jack gave it to me, actually. I just inferred that you left it to tell me that you were rejecting me, telling me I could have it back, that you did not want it." Will's voice breaks on the last word, a suspicious dampness building behind his eyes. He looks up to find tears in the older man's eyes. Hannibal looks as if he's been gutted. Will gathers his strength and raises an arm to ghost his fingers over Hannibal's face. "I'm sorry," he whispers, "for everything I said that day." Before Hannibal can respond, a petite woman in a white lab coat walks in from behind the curtain separating Will from the rest of what must be the ICU.

"Ah, Mr. Graham, you're awake." Her voice is stern and commanding, but there is an air of friendliness behind it. Her hair is silvery in the light, glimmering slightly at the tips that curl inward at her shoulders. Her face is sharp, all of her features tapering together at the point of her chin. "I trust you have been filling him in?" She glances at Hannibal. Will rubs his eyes in disbelief as his eyes land on the man that he knows is Hannibal, but is so far removed from the concept of Hannibal that he can barely believe it. His shoulders sag, at least two inches of his height completely vanished into thin air. The bags under his eyes appear more puffy, as if he has not slept in days. He averts his gaze slightly, looking at the doctor's forehead or nose instead of her eyes. Will sees an echo of the man he loves, but to most this man is an entirely separate human being.

"Yes, I was just catching him up to speed, Dr. Maurin," he confirms. Even his voice sounds different, a melodic quality that is difficult to place and muddles Hannibal's accent.

"Good," voices Dr. Maurin before turning to face Will. "I am glad to see you are awake. We are going to keep you here for a little longer to make sure you're alright. Then you can go back to your original room." She says the last part with a barely perceptible note of sadness, but Will is sure he must have imagined it because her usual smile is back on her lips as if it never left.

"I was actually hoping to take Mr. Graham for some tests before I leave today," Hannibal says, leaning slightly to one side. "He should probably get at least a head CT."

"That would be fine. I'm going on my lunch break now, and the tests should be done by the time I get back," responds Dr. Maurin absent-mindedly. She soon vanishes behind the curtain, leaving Hannibal alone with Will for a second time. Will opens his mouth to say all the things he wishes he could have for the past weeks, that he is sorry, that not knowing if he would see Hannibal again was Hell on Earth, but Hannibal stops him with a kiss to his forehead.

"Shhh, mylimasis," he hums. The mask is in the way, but Will can feel the warmth of his lips on his skin in spite of it. "I know the idea of running at the moment must seem nigh impossible, but it must be now. It took me weeks of planning to get this far, and they will not let you out of their sight as easily a second time." Will nods and closes his eyes in anticipation of the exertion he faces.

"Stay here," Hannibal soothes, "I am going to fetch you a wheelchair, and then we will be on our way." He gives Will's hand a brief parting squeeze, the absence making Will shiver. This is finally it. Now or never. The scale will tip and the glass will shatter, breaking the illusion

he has hid behind for his entire life. He wonders what Mathilde will think of him. Will she regret treating him when she finds out what he is? He hopes that they do not run into her on the way out. He knows there may be blood, and he is unsure if Hannibal shares the same reservations about killing her.

Hannibal returns with the wheelchair and begins unhooking Will from the various machines surrounding him. His touch is so gentle, almost electrifying, and Will speculates that Hannibal would probably not be touching any other patient this way.

"Can you stand?" Hannibal inquires.

"I think so," replies Will as he swings his legs over the side of the bed. A light wave of lightheadedness washes over him, and he pauses, trying to orient himself.

"Take your time," Hannibal reassures, placing a hand on Will's shoulder. Will places his feet on the floor, the cold of it seeping through his socks. Although he was walking around only a few hours ago, it feels like it has been ages since he was last standing upright. He tries to take a step forward, but his knees buckle. Hannibal materializes by his side, catching him by the waist. "It's alright," he soothes, guiding Will to the chair. He caresses the side of Will's face, lightly tousling the mess of curls that has grown out since he was admitted. They do not give haircuts to coma patients, after all. Will leans into the touch, closing his eyes briefly to savor the moment. As soon as they exit from behind the curtain, they will have to pretend, but this moment is for them alone.

Will watches as Hannibal shrinks into himself once again, marveling at the transformation. He looks as if he has donned an entirely new body. He removes his mask, and Will is about to protest when he realizes that wearing it outside the ICU might draw more unwanted attention than going without it. Will allows his eyes to droop slightly, the motion genuine for once. They make their way out of the ICU without a second glance. Everyone here is too busy either trying not to die or trying to prevent someone else from dying. The gravity of death hangs in the air, filling the hall with an aura of despair.

"I'm assuming we are not actually going to do those tests you mentioned," Will whispers, turning his head to peer up at Hannibal.

"You assume correctly," comes the reply. "Tests are mainly to help diagnose patients, and you have no need for that since I know exactly what happened to you and why." Hannibal lingers on this thought for a second, implying that he will explain more later. "We are leaving through the clinic. It is always packed with people who have more than enough to worry about on their own, let alone a nurse transporting his patient." Will hums, content with the plan. On paper, it is simple and quick, but nothing is ever painless with them.

As if on cue, they round the corner of the hallway, inches away from colliding with Mathilde. Will's stomach drops.

"Oh, hi Will!" she announces cheerfully with a genuine smile on her face. "I'm so glad to see you're alright." Will holds his breath, waiting for her to be on her way, but she hesitates and frowns at Hannibal. "You're taking him back to his room already?" The disapproval in her voice is clear, and he can feel Hannibal stiffen behind him.

"Actually I am taking him for tests," he replies, a hint of caution coloring his voice. Will holds onto hope that this will be the end of it, but Mathilde frown becomes even more pronounced.

"Then why are you on this side of the hospital. Radiology is in the opposite direction." Will's face falls, and he knows Hannibal is about to say something when she speaks again, her voice raised. "Who are you? I thought there was something off about you the second I saw you. Where are you taking him? Did the FBI put you up to this? Is that what's going on?" she accuses, voice stiff with distaste.

Before Will can react, Hannibal strides over to her with a single step and strikes her on the head, catching her as she crumples. Her body is completely limp in his arms, and he beckons Will to follow him. He strides purposefully to a small door Will would not have noticed on his own, unlocking it with a large set of keys that seem to have appeared out of nowhere. Will struggles to catch up with him, unaccustomed to maneuvering a wheelchair. He finds himself inside a small storage closet, stocked with various medicines and general hospital supplies. Hannibal gently lowers Mathilde to the floor and places her head on a towel, her brown waves falling over her tanned face. She looks paler in this light, the usual life in her face completely gone, hidden beneath the fog of unconsciousness.

"What are we going to do about her?" Will asks, wondering if Hannibal can hear the worry threatening to creep into his voice.

"It would be easiest to kill her," Hannibal admits, gazing at Mathilde's limp body. "I could give her a large dose of adenosine and her heart would slow and then eventually stop. She would not feel anything, it would be painless." He hesitates, taking in a sharp breath. "If I hid her in the back of the closet, it would take a while for someone to find her. We would be long gone." Will's stomach churns, twisting over itself, and he tries to banish the feeling, but it persists despite his efforts. Hannibal looks up at him, scanning his face for something. "I know you wish to spare her life, and I understand your sentiment. I am indebted to her for what she has done for you, but I do not want to risk her alerting anybody and compromising our efforts," he says finally. Will wracks his brain for solutions, trying to think of anything they can do to allow Mathilde to live. He owes her that much.

"Couldn't you just sedate her? Give her enough to knock her out for an hour or two and leave her here. Someone will find her sooner or later or she'll wake up on her own and find her way. She does work here after all," he pleads. Hannibal considers this, and he looks as if he is about to argue when the door handle begins to turn. Will freezes, absolute panic rising within him. He sees Hannibal stand in the corner of his eye, the glint of a scalpel in his hand.

The door opens and a woman steps through the frame, Will's heart dropping as he sees the familiar silver head of Dr. Maurin. She halts mid-step, taking in the picture of Will draped over the wheelchair, Hannibal gripping a scalpel, and Mathilde lying on the floor. Will waits in anticipation for her to scream or run away, but to his bewilderment, she turns around to close the door behind herself.

"This is not the radiology department," she says, breathing in deeply. "Hello Hannibal." For a moment Will thinks she appears almost wistful, but she lets her tight smile drop, and he can see the tiredness behind her usual reserved demeanor.

"It is nice to see you, Eleanor," remarks Hannibal, lowering the scalpel a hair. Will's eyes widen in shock.

"You two know each other?" The surprise in his voice is unmistakable. Hannibal turns his attention to him, eyes flickering to Dr. Maurin–Eleanor–momentarily.

"I worked at this hospital for years before we met, it would be worrisome if I was not acquainted with my former colleagues. Not to mention that Eleanor has always had a talent for facial recognition." His voice resonates in the small room, the tension in the air thick enough to cut with a knife. Will sees Dr. Maurin's eyes flicker to the side ever so slightly, and he turns his head to find Hannibal lunging after Mathilde, who has silently risen and begun inching toward the PA system. She must have woken up sometime during the commotion. He watches the panic well up inside of her as Hannibal wrenches her off her feet and crushes her to his chest. She opens her mouth to scream, but he covers her mouth with his hand, stifling the sound as it tries to escape her. Mathilde struggles against his grip, hitting her arms against his sides in an attempt to weaken his grip, but Hannibal holds onto her, an unwavering mountain in the storm.

"My dear, I do not want to cause you harm, but I will not hesitate if you do not give me a choice," he says gently. Mathilde makes one last attempt at wrestling free from his grip and subsides, becoming completely still. Hannibal removes his hand from her mouth and loosens his grip slightly. "If I let you go, will you behave?" he asks, genuine sincerity in his voice. She nods meekly, taking in a shaking breath through her nose. Hannibal releases her slowly, ensuring she is steady on her feet. She clenches her hands in her scrubs, slowly stepping away from the man. The second she is out of his immediate grasp she practically flies to the intercom, fingers hovering over the keypad. Hannibal sighs in exasperation, stepping toward her when she begins to shout.

"Stop!" The terror is written plainly on her face. "Or I'll call a code silver."

"Mathilde. . ." begins Dr. Maurin, but Mathilde shoots her a glare that could cut through steel.

Hannibal freezes mid-stride, an inscrutable expression flickering behind his eyes. He takes a step back, and an unmistakable grin spreads across his face.

"How resourceful you are," he muses. "I can see why Will respects you as much as he does." Her face reddens at this, clearly perturbed by the compliment. Will feels entirely left out of the conversation, and he gapes in confusion. Dr. Maurin takes pity on him, lowering her voice as she speaks.

"Code silver is the standardized code for any dangerous intruder. It can signify an active shooter, a person with a weapon, or a hostage situation. If Mathilde confirms the command, the hospital will go into lockdown and the police will be called." Her voice is steady, but Will feels as if he is falling down a never-ending pit. "It would be very difficult for you to leave, " she adds, a bit pointlessly. Will diverts his attention to Hannibal, who appears unfazed by what Will sees as the ultimate catastrophe. How can Hannibal be so calm? Will feels as if he is going to unravel at the seams, denaturing at the very prospect of what might happen. Hannibal continues to gaze at Mathilde with the same polite curiosity, waiting for her to make her move, but it is Dr. Maurin who breaks the tension.

"Mathilde, I know you are probably terrified and angry, and you have every right to be both of those, but please, think before you act." She pauses, walking swiftly to stand beside Mathilde, who has begun trembling. "I know Hannibal. He only hurt you because you tried to stop him, right?" She looks to Will for confirmation, and he nods once. He has no idea why she would want to help them, but he will not look a gifted horse in the teeth. Turning back to face Mathilde, she lifts her hands to cup her face. "If you let him leave, no one else will be hurt. If you do this," she tilts her head toward the intercom, "then people will die. If not for your sake and mine, think about your patients, the security guards and police who have families to go back home to. I have known Hannibal for a long time, and he is a man that does not stop until he achieves what he set out to do, no matter the cost. Do not drag the innocent people here into this." The tears that have been welling in Mathilde's eyes begin to fall, leaving small smudges of mascara in the crevices between her nose and cheeks.

"Will is an innocent," she wails in between her sobs. She gently removes Dr. Maurin's hands from her face and turns to face Hannibal head on. "You're Hannibal Lecter, aren't you?" she accuses.

"Yes."

"You're a murderer." It is not a question, but Hannibal dips his head in assent anyway. Mathilde clenches her hands into fists in an attempt to steady her breathing. "I googled Will to see if I could find out why the FBI is so concerned with him," she admits. Will winces internally. Nothing good ever comes from searching his name on the internet, and all he can hope is that she did not read anything by Freddie Lounds. "Why are you so determined to take him? Have you not taken enough from him? What do you want with him?" A fire blazes behind her eyes. Mathilde does not give up on her patients. Hannibal turns to Will with a quizzical expression on his face, as if he is asking Will's permission. Will furrows his brow in confusion, but then it hits him, the impact as harrowing as if he was hurled from a moving train. Hannibal is uncertain if Will wants others to know about them. Will knows that Hannibal wants it desperately, that he yearns for people to see that Will is with him by choice instead of by force, so the fact that Hannibal would let Will choose if the truth comes to light melts his heart. Before he can stop himself, the words begin falling out of his mouth.

"He wants the same thing that I want," he says. Mathilde shifts toward him, utterly surprised by his interjection. He is about to rain on her perception of him as an innocent man. "I know it may be difficult to believe, and I'm not asking you to believe me, but I do want you to at least listen. Please." He allows his hands to fall into his lap, awaiting her response. Her expression softens, and she nods for him to continue. "Mathilde, I love him. I love him more than anything in this world, and he loves me." Her mouth parts slightly in shock, eyes flickering between him and Hannibal. "It took us a long time for us to find each other, and others in my position would even say that it was not worth the blood and tears, but for me it was. It always will be. He is my other half. We are two sides of the same coin." As the words leave his lips, Will pushes himself to stand and stumbles over to Hannibal, who holds out a hand for him. They intertwine their fingers together, united as one. "Please do not take him from me, Mathilde," he finishes. There is nothing more he can say. She knows now, and it is up to her to make a choice.

He can see the cogs turning in her head as she processes the information, weighing the consequences. Mathilde is anything but thorough, and she is not different in her consideration here, but then the scale tips, and she withers slightly, letting go of the tension she did not even realize she was carrying within her.

"Go," she beckons, urgency slipping into her voice, "before I change my mind." Will steps toward the door, demonstrating that he can walk, and he nods at Mathilde. He wants to thank her, to do something to show her how deeply he appreciates everything she has done for him, but he knows that the best thing he can do for her is to leave her alone, so he offers his warmest smile instead. Hannibal follows closely behind him, but he stops a few paces away from the two women.

"Mathilde, you are not only a capable nurse, but a brilliant person as well. You have a resplendent fire burning within you, do not let anyone stifle it," he says. At this, Mathilde sobs, and Dr. Maurin envelops her in her arms, murmuring placid reassurances too quiet for Will to hear. Hannibal turns to the older woman, and tilts his head.

"It was a pleasant surprise to see you again, and I thank you for everything. I hope we never find ourselves crossing paths again, for both our sakes," he declares plainly.

"Likewise," she responds, weighing something in her head silently, and continues. "I must warn you that Jack Crawford is here. He tried to see Will in the ICU, but I told him we were not accepting non-medical staff at the time. I told him he had to wait until Will went back to his room." Hannibal merely nods and hastens his gait to fall into step with Will.

Chapter End Notes

I strive to be as medically accurate as possible, which is why I had to split up this chapter. It ended up being much longer than I initially planned for, but I really liked how it turned out. This is the last we will see of Dr. Maurin and Mathilde, but I might write an epilogue if that is something you all would be interested in. Thanks for reading!

And the Glass Shatters

Chapter Notes

TW for general violence, threats, etc.

I wrote this chapter in the middle of the night because I decided to procrastinate by hanging out with my friend, so sorry if that had an effect on it.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To Will's surprise, the pair do not encounter any obstacles along the way. Hannibal leads him to another storage room where he hands Will a pair of scrubs.

"We will draw far less attention if we both dress like we work here, and given that you can walk on your own it is an improvement to the original plan. They will be anticipating for me to take you out of here by force, not two colleagues leaving after a long shift," he explains, hesitating a moment before turning around. Will winces at this. He had hoped that Hannibal did not notice that he avoided changing when the other man was in the same room, but apparently he had not been subtle enough. He takes off the thin hospital gown, discarding it to the floor. Of all the things in the hospital, it is one of the things he will miss the least. He tries to put his foot through the pant leg, but his depth perception is still off, and he misses. His face reddens, embarrassment rising from within his chest.

"Hannibal, I think I need help," he voices dejectedly. If Hannibal notices the tinge of his cheeks, he pretends not to, and leans down to guide Will's legs into the scrubs. His expression is blank, detached from his actions, which only makes Will more self conscious. He feels like he is being treated like a patient. Wordlessly, Hannibal reaches for the shirt, tossing it over Will's head in one smooth movement. "Thank you," Will says, still avoiding eye contact. Hannibal merely dips his chin slightly and beckons for Will to follow.

Hannibal navigates the hospital as if he never left. In a way, it is strange to see Hannibal blend in so well here. He is at ease, entirely in his element, which is a complete contrast to what most people know him for. Jack always claimed that Hannibal flourished in the medical field because, like many psychopaths, he enjoys the power it grants him over others, but Will rarely agreed with Jack's assessments then, and he does not agree with them now. Hannibal is something else, unquantifiable. He defies categorization by nature, one foot firmly planted in both worlds whenever there is a separation of strata. While Will does not deny that Hannibal no doubt enjoys the power that comes with killing, he is certain that is not why Hannibal became a surgeon. Hannibal never had that instinct that drew him to kill, and Will knows he could stop if he wanted to. In Italy, he was terrified that Hannibal would bring the FBI down on them, which is why he objected to it so strongly at the time. The circumstances since then have shifted, as it is Will who brought the FBI's scrutiny upon them, not Hannibal. He realizes that they will never be entirely free from the hunt, that peace is something they gave

up when they chose this life. Attempting to contain Hannibal will always prove futile in the end, so he may as well stop trying. He is only going to harm them in the process, and they must be united if they are to endure this. Hannibal saved lives because of his ability to care. Will hates how the world does not see that side of Hannibal, the man who has the capacity to love and cherish equally as much as to despise and desecrate. But that defeats the point of being a psychopath, and that is how the world will always see him.

They round the corner, the strides of their feet perfectly synchronized. It is taking all of Will's self control not to fall into Hannibal's arms and lose himself there. Today's events have drained him considerably in both a physical and psychological sense, so the urge to be comforted is overwhelming. He realizes that it has only been weeks for him, but Hannibal has not seen him in months. He looks up at Hannibal, unspoken words written on both of their faces.

"We will talk later," Hannibal whispers. "I promise." The corners of his mouth tick up, and Will smiles back. The miniscule details of Hannibal's face had growth fuzzy, as if he had taken them on an old camera. Seeing him again revitalizes them, as if he took the images out and pressed them with an iron, smoothing out all of the wrinkles.
Will notices the security guards lining the entrance to the clinic a split second before Hannibal does, stumbling to a halt. They might have gotten away without being recognized by the staff, but the guards are another problem entirely. He turns to Hannibal, trying his best to squash the panic threatening to rise up inside of him. To his surprise, Hannibal is completely unconcerned.

"Sometimes they station guards at the clinic when it is crowded to make sure no one can easily enter the hospital. It is simply a safety precaution," he explains, but Will is unconvinced. "We can leave through a different exit, if you are concerned." He tries to reassure himself that he is being paranoid, but the sick feeling in his gut persists. One of the guards looks his way for a moment, and Will freezes, terror threatening to spill over, but the man looks away after a moment.

"Yeah, that would probably be a good idea," he responds, still on edge from the interaction with the guard.

Hannibal steers them away from the clinic, walking through the hallways with a purpose Will tries to emulate. One quality of Hannibal's Will has always admired is his uncanny ability to act as if he belongs anywhere he goes. There is not a single place Will can think of where Hannibal would be unable to blend in. They approach the exit, and Will balks when he realizes that it is the main entrance to the hospital.

"Are you crazy?" he hisses. "We can't just walk out the main door and expect not to be seen!" Hannibal touches the side of his arm gently, and Will is irate at the fact that the simple gesture manages to calm him as much as it does.

"That is the point, my love," Hannibal whispers. "If we act like we do not want to be seen, then they will think we are hiding. The art of hiding in plain sight is that you do not hide." He rushes his fingers over Will's knuckles, the motion grounding Will in his body. He wants nothing else but to intertwine their hands together, but now is not the time.

"Alright. Let's go then." He sets off, slowly at first to allow Hannibal to take the lead. It is unclear who starts it first, but they launch into polite conversation, conjuring up lives for the people whose skins they are wearing. They play off of each other naturally, as if the exercise is something they have always done instead of part of their ploy to walk out the front doors of a hospital as wanted men. There are guards stationed here too, but Will feels a renewed sense of tenacity, holding himself higher and using his arms to gesticulate when he wants to make a point in their conversation. Hannibal continues with the act of the tired nurse who has not slept nearly enough, but he still smiles at Will, nodding along with the story about the failed barbecue with Will's imagined extended family. They pass through the automatic doors, and the guards barely look at them. Will lets out a breath he did not even realize he was holding.

They make their way through the red sidewalk, avoiding the cars urgently zipping in and out of the drop-off zone. They begin crossing a road called Orleans Street, heading in the direction of a parking garage. Will notices that it is overpopulated with cars, almost all of the spaces are taken. He smiles in satisfaction. This will work to their advantage as there are enough people milling about for them to be inconspicuous, and the dim atmosphere would prevent anyone from getting a good look at them. Hannibal takes him by the hand now and leads him to a secluded corner by a staircase. The landing is filthy, covered in cigarette butts and old trash. The walls look as if they would be wet to the touch, oozing a green substance from between the cracks. Hannibal wrenches a black duffel bag from under the stairs, tossing it lightly onto the ground between them and kneeling down to open it.

"No one uses these stairs. They have been out of commission for years and no one has ever thought to fix them," he explains, sorting through the contents of the bag. He pulls out a t-shirt and jeans in Will's size, and hands them to the younger man. "If anyone did see us leaving, it would be best to alter our appearance. Even if no one did, it would still be wise to remove any associations with the hospital considering you will be reported missing sooner or later." Will nods his assent, taking the clothes from Hannibal. He is glad that they are plain, everyday clothes. Something familiar in the sea of the clinical sterility he has lived through for the last few weeks. Hannibal hesitates for a second, as if he wants to say something, but then he thinks better of it and reaches back into the bag.

"You can help me, Hannibal," Will says carefully. "It would be inconvenient if I crashed over and made a bunch of noise," he adds, using humor to deflect from the root of the tension between them. Hannibal is clearly not buying it, but he acquiesces regardless.

It is easier to get into the clothes this time, and he trembles slightly when Hannibal's hand brushes against one of the scars on his back as he pulls the shirt over Will's head. He bites his lip, hoping that the older man did not notice. He looks at Hannibal, trying to read his face, but he is met with the same inscrutable wall as before. He lifts a hand to touch Hannibal's shoulder, gripping onto him tightly as if the man might dissolve in the air before his eyes.

"Don't do this to me, Hannibal," he pleads. "Don't shut me out like this, searching for clues in the dark." He traces small circles on Hannibal's shoulder, hovering within his personal space. He watches as Hannibal hesitates, then brings his own hand up to cover the one Will has planted on his shoulder. The warmth and pressure of it is intoxicating, and Will feels as if he is on the verge of melting into the ground when Hannibal finally speaks.

"Every night, I see your body lying at the base of that tree, crumpled and completely absent." His voice is shaking, the usual calm precision completely absent, but he continues. "I wondered if you knew that you were sick, if you did not trust me to tell me." Will shakes his head in disbelief.

"No, Hannibal. . . I would never lie to you, not about that," he amends, and Hannibal nods his head, lips pressed together to form a tight line.

"When I took you home, I was extraordinarily restless. One of the things that allowed me to be as successful as I was as a surgeon was my ability to dissociate from the person I was treating. I could see that they were alive, I knew it beyond a doubt, but their illness was only a puzzle for me to solve, their broken bodies a disassembled pen to be put back together. Treating you was. . . different. I could not make objective decisions about your health, or my own for that matter. I could not eat. I could not sleep. I began second-guessing all of my decisions, which only worsened as it became abundantly clear that I did not possess the resources to treat you properly," he takes another shaking breath, squeezing Will's hand beneath his to the point of pain. "I knew you would think that I had left you," he says quietly. "I knew that it would break you, to wake up in a foreign place with no recollection as to how you got there. You would realize that I am not there and that you have no way to contact me. I knew that leaving you to that after our fight would lead you to think I had left you, but I am selfish, Will. I am selfish because I knew all this, and I did it anyway." The expression on his face breaks Will's heart. Hannibal spent all these months believing that Will hated him, and Will thought that Hannibal had rejected him. Even though it is not remotely funny, he cannot help laughing. He chuckles mirthfully, and Hannibal stiffens, falling into what Will has dubbed his "doctor" persona. He presses the back of his hand to Will's forehead, taking a mental inventory of what could have befallen him, but Will only laughs harder.

"I'm sorry, Hannibal," he wheezes, nearly doubling over, "It's just that we are absolutely terrible at communication. I mean look at us," he says, grasping Hannibal's forearms, "Here we are, insecure in our obvious love for each other. I love you, Hannibal, so much, and now you're stuck with me because you're mine, and I'm never letting you go again." Hannibal smiles at his words, absolute adoration written plainly on his face. Will quivers at the way Hannibal looks at him, as if he is gazing into the depths of his south. It is so intense that Will almost cannot take it. He steps closer to Hannibal, reducing the space between them until it is nonexistent. Tilting his head up, he brings their mouths together. It takes Hannibal a second to process what is happening, the surprise obvious in the way he stiffens minutely. The action upsets Will as he realizes that Hannibal truly did not believe that Will would want this, to be with him in this way. The emotion passes the instant Hannibal brings his hand up to caress the side of Will's cheek, tucking a stray curl behind his ear and resting his fingers beneath his jaw, pressing so lightly that it feels like a whisper on his skin. Hannibal's breath hitches slightly, and it fills Will's heart with butterflies. The kiss is not deep: no tongues or teeth, solely their breaths mingling together as the world melts away before them. The moment is soft and tender in a way that Will has never experienced before. In almost every relationship he has had, kissing was only ever a means to an end, but he would be content to kiss Hannibal like this forever. Although the kiss itself is chaste, even by his standards, it is the most intimate he has ever felt with anyone. He feels laid bare, stripped of his layers and wholly seen.

Hannibal breaks the kiss first, gently pushing Will away to create a distance between them. It

is only a few inches, but Will feels as if it may as well be thousands of miles. Hannibal must see the utter devastation in his expression because he reaches over to hold Will's hand between both of his and brushes Will's knuckles with his thumb.

"Mylimasis, now is hardly the time for. . ." he trails off, leaving the unsaid words hanging between them. They had never properly discussed intimacy before, and Will wishes now that they had as it would have made this less awkward.

"Yeah, you're right," Will replies, holding onto Hannibal's hand with his. Hannibal grins at him and crouches beside the duffel bag once more, lifting the bottom away to reveal an assortment of weapons. He hands one of the guns to Will, the handle pointed toward him. Will takes it apprehensively, turning it around between his fingers.

"Hannibal. . ." he starts to say, but Hannibal cuts him off.

"It is just in case, Will. I want you to be able to defend yourself if anything happens." He closes Will's fingers around the pistol, tightening Will's grip. Hannibal returns his focus to the contents within the bag, removing a pair of brown work pants and a grey sweater. He discards the scrubs, slipping into the new clothes quickly. Will checks to make sure the safety is on and stuffs the pistol into the waistband of his jeans. He realizes belatedly that it would probably be common courtesy to turn around, but Hannibal does not seem to care, so he does not either. He watches as Hannibal pulls the grey sweater over his head. The combo of the pants and the sweater is not something he would have ever picked for himself, but Hannibal somehow makes it work, although Will cannot tell if he can be considered an unbiased opinion here.
A loud crash sounds from behind the wall, and Will covers his ears, grimacing at how they begin to ring. Within a few seconds he straightens up, trying to regain his balance. The coma and seizure have toyed with his vestibular sense, and it is making it difficult for him to recover from quick changes in his orientation. He shakes his head to try and clear the stars still dancing blurrily behind his eyes. He finally wrestles control of his senses back and raises his head to look at Hannibal, only to find Jack Crawford holding his usual P226 pistol to Hannibal's head.

"Look who the cat dragged in," he jeers, pressing the end of the pistol into the back of Hannibal's head. Turning his gaze to finally look at Will, he changes his tone completely. "Are you alright, Will? Has he done anything to you?"

"I'm alright, Jack," he says, unsure of what he can do. Of all the things he had planned for, running into Jack in the corner of a filthy parking garage was not on the list.

"Will. . ." Hannibal starts to say, but Jack digs the pistol deeper into his scalp.

"Not another word from you, Lecter. You've done enough to him already," Jack sneers, venom dripping from his voice. Will averts his eyes to meet Hannibal's. He does not say anything, but Will can see the silent words written on his face.

I love you. They say. *No matter what happens, I will understand.* Will shakes his head, the movement so small he doubts Jack will be able to pick up on it, but he knows Hannibal will

understand. He is not going to give up on Hannibal, and if they both die in the process, then so be it.

"So," Jack chides. "You really thought you could sneak in here and take him out from under us? You think you're so high and mighty, that you're the only one who knows about this place." He gestures to the secluded landing they are standing in. "Well you're not. And now you're going to pay for it." The hatred is unmistakable in Jack's eyes, his mouth curled in disgust. "You stabbed me, you killed Abigail, and then you kidnapped Will, forcing him into living with you against his will. We have more than enough evidence to convict you. You're going to get the death penalty one way or another."

"Or another?" Hannibal queries, the calm in his tone clearly infuriating Jack. "Are you planning to kill me, Jack? Is that why you are the only one here? To limit the witnesses?" he taunts, a sly smile creeping up his face. "Will is a witness, you know. What is to be done about him?"

"I see what you're doing," Jack spits back at him. "You're antagonizing him, and for what? Do you really think Will would care how you die?"

"Why not ask him for yourself, he is a participant in this conversation, even if you choose to treat him as if he is not," Hannibal retorts, meeting Will's eyes a second time.

"Fine, I'll humor you" Jack rolls his eyes in exasperation. "Alright, Will. Do you care how this son of a bitch goes out? He's dead one way or another, why not now? What's the difference" Hannibal chuckles.

"The difference is that you would be a murder, Jack," Hannibal says mockingly. "Just like me." This last bit clearly strikes a nerve with Jack, who turns back to Hannibal, seemingly forgetting about Will for the moment.

"You and I are nothing alike," he sneers. "I am upholding the law, you are thwarting it. Stopping you does not contradict my prerogative."

"Possibly not, but it does make you a hypocrite," Hannibal muses thoughtfully. He looks a bit awkward standing there with his hands raised in the air, practically talking to the wall whenever he speaks. The imbalance of power only seems to amuse Jack further, who is enjoying the interaction immensely.

"I don't care what it makes me, just that you won't be around anymore to complain about it." His expression hardens, full of resolve as clear as day. As if suddenly remembering that Will is also there, he finally addresses him directly. "So, Will. Do you care if I take him out now? I can't imagine you would after all he's put you through. Justice is justice after all." He turns to face Will, or at least where Will was standing a minute ago. In the time that he and Hannibal were arguing, Will had silently slipped the pistol Hannibal gave him out of his waistband and flipped the safety off.

"As a matter of fact, I do," he announces as he presses the barrel of the pistol to Jack's head. Jack balks, flailing as if he has just seen a ghost, utter disbelief in his eyes.

"Will, what the hell are you doing? Are you really defending him after all he's put you through? For God's sake, Will, he killed abigail! Did she mean nothing to you?" Will watches as Jack flounders, the rug of authority pulled cleanly out from under him. He had been expecting a standoff between himself and Hannibal, but that is why Jack always has and always will fail when it concerns them. It was never Jack against Hannibal, but Jack against both of them. He and Hannibal are one entity, forever conjoined. When Will does not respond, Jack continues, nervous energy radiating off of him. "Look Will, I'm doing this for you! He won't be able to torment you anymore. You'll be free." At this Will laughs, the sound echoing off of the metal and concrete.

"You're doing this for me?" he jeers. "That is the biggest pile of bullshit I have ever heard. Stop kidding yourself, Jack, and just admit it already. You're doing this for yourself, and you always have been. This is about your revenge and your reputation." The second the words leave his lips, he knows he has hit the nail on the head. Jack practically shakes with anger.

"What did you do to him?" he yells. "I'm talking to you, Lecter." He kicks the back of Hannibal's calf with his boot, and Will presses the gun into his scalp even more firmly than before. Hannibal winces minusculely, then smirks.

"I have done nothing to him," he states plainly. "Will does as he wants."

"Liar," Jack hisses through gritted teeth. "You manipulated him into this. No wonder you thought it would be so easy to take him from here, you think you have him wrapped around your finger," he accuses, practically seething. Will is growing tired of all the back and forth, and he particularly hates how Jack is treating him as if he is not even there, as if he has no autonomy on his own, as if he has to be saved by Jack, the FBI's personal knight in shining armor. Before he can open his mouth to speak, he hears Hannibal's voice, gentle in spite of the events surrounding him.

"Are you certain of this, Will?" He turns his head ever so slightly. It is not enough to meet Will's gaze, but Will appreciates the sentiment either way. "There will be no taking it back."

"Shut up and leave Will alone, you hear me?" Jack warns, kicking the back of Hannibal's shin a second time, but Hannibal smiles all the same.

"Yes, I am sure," Will says with conviction in his tone. Hannibal practically beams at the words, and Will would smile if the circumstances were less dire.

"What the hell are you talking about, Will?" Jack asks, finally acknowledging Will's presence as if he has not been holding a gun to his head this entire time. "And don't pretend like your stunt with the gun is supposed to intimidate me. I know you don't have it in you." Will contemplates his next words carefully, deliberately phrasing what he wants to say in a way that will set Jack off.

"Hannibal is right, you know." The words hit the mark beautifully, and Will smiles inwardly at the victory. "You are doing this all for yourself. Your reputation must be in shambles after you let the Chesapeake Ripper slip through your fingers, especially considering you broke the law to do it in the first place." Jack opens his mouth to protest, but Will raises a hand to stop him and the man actually listens for once in his life. "You can pretend like you're doing this

for Bella, for Beverly, or for any of his other victims, but not for me." He considers his words again, pausing for a moment before he continues. "Come to think of it, while the world may see Hannibal as your biggest failure, your greatest mistake will always be me." Jack shifts uncomfortably, disliking the scrutiny of Will's analysis. "Are you really this blind, Jack? Can you see nothing?"

"I know that you cared for him, back before you found out who he was, but I did not realize that hadn't changed. He is not good for you, Will. Whatever he has told you to think, it's a lie. He is a murderer, he will hurt you one way or another because it is his nature." Jack appears completely flummoxed by the recent developments in the conversation, and Will can tell that he is grasping onto any loose end he can find.

"I told you not to psychoanalyze me, you won't like me when I'm psychoanalyzed," he prods, purposefully reminding Jack of the day he introduced Hannibal to Will. The three of them have barely moved since the confrontation began, and Will feels antsy. He wants to get this over with as quickly as possible, but something tells him that he will regret it later on if he does, so he decides to take his time, also accounting for the fact that Hannibal may have plans of his own.

"Will, are you seriously joking right now? You think this is funny? Here I am, trying to rid the world of this monster, and now I have to deal with you defending him and for what? What has he told you? You do realize that he is a manipulative liar, right?" The exasperation is clear in Jack's tone, and Will would feel sorry for him if he was not being so infuriating.

"You still don't see it. Wow, I'm surprised they let you keep your job at the BAU. If you actually paid any attention over the last few years instead of prioritizing your own ego, you would have noticed that I left with Hannibal willingly. I called him that day because I didn't want him to get caught, and then I ran away with him." Will decides that he would do anything to have a picture of the face Jack is making right now. His mouth hangs open in an elongated "o", and Will is half expecting him to start performing one of Hannibal's operas. To his disappointment, Jack does not begin an impromptu opera demonstration, and instead looks at Will in disgust.

"You're just like him, then. Being complicit in murder makes you just as bad as the murderer." Will has no idea why Jack is attempting to appeal to this philosophical debate. Hannibal is the only one he cares to have such discussions with anyway.

"Congrats, Jack, you're halfway there this time," he jeers. "I'm not complicit, but I am just like him. I am a murderer." Jack raises an eyebrow, clearly not believing him.

"Killing in self-defense isn't murder, Will. Even if you display the corpse like you did." Will laughs upon hearing this. Is Jack really this naive? He had completely forgotten about Randall Tier, and hearing him brought up again feels so distant and removed from his reality today.

"No, no, I'm not talking about Randall Tier. I'm talking about Abigail Hobbs." The name drops between them, going off like a bomb and leaving nothing but destruction in its wake.

"You killed Abigail?" Jack breathes, genuine fear entering his eyes.

"I did."

"You're not who I thought you were, Will." Is all Jack manages to say.

"I guess I'm not," Will replies, finally feeling the exhaustion weigh on him. It feels good to finally tell Jack, even if he can never truly understand. "Now drop the gun. Drop it, or I will shoot you."

"How do I know you're not going to shoot me anyway? You killed Abigail after all." Jack has clearly decided to be difficult. Will sighs. Hannibal has been quiet up until now, patiently listening to the verbal altercation with mild amusement, but now he breaks his silence.

"Will does not want to kill you because you serve a much higher purpose alive than you would in death," he explains. Jack looks between the both of them, attempting to decipher what Hannibal means. Hannibal takes mercy on the man, and continues. "Will wants his true nature to be seen by the world, as mine is. He desires for people to know that he has made his own choice and not been forced into this by me. If he kills you, the chance for that is gone. People will assume that I committed the deed, given my public reputation. Your death will have been inelegant," he finishes. Jack is clearly disgusted by what Hannibal is telling him, but there is no mistaking the sincerity in Hannibal's tone.

"If that's the case, then I might as well take you down with me." He huffs, and his eyes narrow to slits. Will acts before he can even process what he is doing. His foot connects with the back of Jack's knee, causing the shot to go wide. Hannibal springs into a blur of motion, always the coiled snake ready to strike. He tackles Jack, immobilizing him in a headlock. Will rushes to stomp on his hand, knocking the pistol out of his grasp. Will picks it up and pockets it. Jack does not need it anymore. He aims the gun at Jack's torso, keeping a safe enough distance to be out of his reach.

"What was that about taking him down with you?" Will asks, not even trying to hide the sarcasm that leaches into his voice. Jack grunts, unable to speak given the circumstances. "You got him?" he asks Hannibal, hoping that the man understands what Will means. When Hannibal nods in affirmative, Will lowers the pistol, and crouches to level his face with Jack's.

"For years, you forced me into doing something I did not want to do. I thought it would be impossible for me to feel happy ever again after all of the despair that you dragged me through. The end justifies the means, right? Well I finally found my happiness, Jack. I am going to let you go this time, but mark my words. If you touch him, if you ever get in the way of my happiness ever again, I will kill you." With that, he lifts the butt of the pistol and slams it against Jack's head, knocking the man out cold. He replaces Jack's pistol in its holster, and finally turns to face Hannibal.

"You are truly magnificent in every way, mylimasis," he whispers, awe audible in the inflection of his voice. "I could not have hoped for a better outcome." Will nods his assent, placing a swift kiss on the high point of Hannibal's cheekbone.

"Let's get out of here," he says as he clasps Hannibal's hand in his.

Chapter End Notes

I did want to say that I know a lot of people dislike Jack Crawford, and I definitely made him a huge ass in this chapter, but that it's mainly because I am writing from Will's perspective, and this is how he sees Jack. Not to mention that I'm writing based off of another author's interpretation of these characters, so I'm simultaneously trying the make the characters my own but be faithful to both the source material and the way they are characterized in the fic this is dedicated to.

Thank you so much for reading!

Lost to the Sea

Chapter Notes

Don't let the chapter title fool you, this chapter is basically a drop of angst and then a bunch of fluff :)

I did want to reassure those that try to steer clear of anything explicit that this is as far as I'm going to go in my writing. I do not write explicit content, so I'm sorry to those that are disappointed by that.

If you happen not to want any romance, then feel free to skip this chapter. Nothing plot significant really happens, and I would be happy to summarize in the comments.

Thanks for reading, I truly appreciate its so much!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To his dismay, Will ends up leaning on Hannibal the entire way to the car, despite the relatively short distance. He prays Hannibal does not see the slight blush heating his face when he lifts him into the passenger seat of the Acura TL. Today's events have left him slightly disoriented, and he finds himself picking at the light scratches he finds on his seat.

"I hope we're not adding auto theft to our list of crimes," he slurs. "Or at least to your list of crimes." Hearing this, Hannibal raises his eyebrows in question.

"Are you implying that it would not be an addition for you because you previously committed auto theft?" There is genuine surprise in his tone, which annoys Will for some reason.

"You think I wouldn't be able to steal a car?" Will accuses, opening his eyes to glare at the other man. Hannibal merely laughs mirthfully as he turns the keys in the ignition.

"To answer your first question, no we are not stealing this car. Secondly, you must remind me to feed you as soon as we arrive at our destination. You become terribly argumentative when you haven't eaten." They leave the parking garage without any FBI agents swooping down on them, and Will relaxes in his seat, shivering slightly. Hannibal turns the heated seat on for him, earning a grunt of annoyance from Will at being babied. He secretly enjoys when Hannibal looks after him like this. The experience is new, unfamiliar, but there is a certain comfort to it that Will cannot help but enjoy. He closes his eyes, relishing in the warmth radiating through him and soothing his sore muscles.

"It's entirely your fault if I'm being hangry," he retorts, eyes still closed. "You stole my breakfast." Even with his eyes closed, he can feel the smirk spreading across Hannibal's face.

"It was imperative that you had an empty stomach. The dose of insulin was precisely enough to shock your body, but not enough to actually kill you. Eating would have tampered with the precision of my calculations, risking the possibility that you would not have deteriorated enough for them to move you to the ICU, which was the entire goal of the operation." Will knows that he should not feel comforted by the utterly inappropriate smugness Hannibal is displaying at what was essentially almost killing him, but he cannot help it. The unabashed flagrancy is so unmistakably Hannibal, and Will has grown to find it endearing. It is a comfort, a routine to fall back into after being separated for so long.

"You make drugging me sound like it is some staggering medical feat," he laughs. "Now that I think about it, you seem to enjoy it a lot. Maybe I should try it sometime, see what the appeal of it is." In hindsight, he realizes that this might be a sensitive topic considering their history together, but Hannibal takes it in stride, matching Will's martyred tone.

"My veins are absolutely quivering in terror, mylimasis. Perhaps I should teach you how to do it properly so that I do not lose function of my arm for the better part of the day." Will can tell he is joking, but he pauses, and Will can feel the atmosphere become more serious. "I must admit, I am pleasantly surprised that you are able to make light of what I thought was a topic of distress for you. Our history together is littered with so many missteps that I could never deign to count them all, but I would consider my drugging you to be among the largest." Will does not have the energy for this discussion. He wants to be able to explain to Hannibal how the experience has shaped him, changed him, but that he has learned to move past it. He will never forget what the other man has done to him, but he is not entirely innocent himself. They have hurt each other a dozen times over, but if they could survive that, then they can survive anything. Instead of speaking, he wills his hand to move, resting it on the inside of Hannibal's thigh, just above his knee. He smiles at the sharp intake of breath, caressing the fabric with his thumb.

"Sleep, my love," he hears Hannibal say, but the fog has already overtaken him, and he lets it cover him in its darkness.

Will wakes to a warm bed, the soft fibers of a thick quilt enveloping him in a hearty embrace. Blinking the sleep from his eyes, he discerns that they must have arrived wherever Hannibal was taking them. He flushes with embarrassment when he realizes that Hannibal must have carried him and tucked him into bed. As if right on cue, the older man materializes in the doorway, the few undone strands of hair framing his face in the dim light. He is still wearing the same sweater as before, and Will notices how it rounds off his shoulders, hiding the predatory strength Will knows so well. He smiles softly, beaming at Will as if he has cured cancer instead of woken up during some ungodly hour of the day. Will reaches up to smooth the unruly curls away, and he is horrified to find himself in possession of one of the worst cases of bed-head he has ever had.

"Good evening, Will, I trust you slept well," greets Hannibal, his bare feet pattering on the wooden floor as he walks to sit on the side of the bed.

"I slept like the dead," Will grins, still aggressively trying to smooth away the tangle of curls. Hannibal pulls his hand away, causing Will to grunt in frustration.

"I must admit that I find you rather charming like this." He rubs his thumb and pointer finger together, as if contemplating something. "It is a quality I have always admired about you, your ability to completely disregard how the rest of the world perceives you. It seems so freeing."

"Are you complimenting me on the fact that I don't give a shit?" Will suggests, still chasing the sleep from his eyes. Hannibal chuckles. Will melts. Hearing Hannibal laugh after being separated for as long as they were stokes a fire within him, his nerves electrified. It is as if someone has crawled inside his brain and turned the sensitivity up to its maximum setting.

"Have I mentioned that in addition to your cantankerous disposition, you also become quite vulgar?" Hannibal quips, brushing his thumb over Will's knuckles.

"Good thing you're so smitten with me," Will teases, "God knows how you of all people managed it with my terrible bad habits and brain-eating immune system." He returns the pressure of Hannibal's hand, gliding the pads of his fingers over the vertical scar on Hannibal's wrist, noting how the older man shivers beneath his touch.

"You utilize self-deprecating humor to conceal your insecurities," Hannibal says, suddenly serious. "I love you, brain-eating immune system and all. Did you truly think I do not?" The sadness is unmistakable in his tone, but Will feels the true weight of it when Hannibal breaks eye contact and turns his head away. Will notices that whenever Hannibal does not want to process his emotions, he slips on the mask of indifference, expression going completely blank, unreadable. He hides behind it like a shield, protecting himself from the pain he is unready to face. Will reaches out to cup Hannibal's face in the palm of his hand, but Hannibal staunchly refuses to meet his gaze.

"No, of course I don't think that. I see your love for me Hannibal, I feel it enveloping me every second of my waking life, and I even sense its presence in my dreams. It's like a wave washes over me every time you look at me, and it's just so much. It's so intense. There has never been anyone like you, ever, and there never will be again." He takes a breath, noticing the wetness that has begun to form in the corners of Hannibal's eyes. "It's too much and not enough at the same time. I see you, and you are so perfect, and then here I am all sweaty and covered in dog fur. To think that you love me for who I am alone. . . it is difficult for me to believe." The words are harsh, and he knows it, but he wants to be honest. They need to be honest with each other for once. "No one ever has before," he adds, voice dropping to a whisper. It is exactly when he utters this last bit that Hannibal seems to understand. Ferocity glints in his eyes, and Will momentarily taken aback as Hannibal darts his hand under Will's shirt, tracing along one of his scars with his fingernail.

"Is this why?" he inquires, a sinister undertone to his voice that was not there before.

"I had hoped that you didn't notice those," Will admits. Hannibal retracts his hand from under Will's shirt, and Will can see the walls coming up behind his eyes. Exasperated, he rubs his eyes with the back of his palms. "Hannibal, for once in your life can you let me finish before you jump to conclusions? I know you think that I don't trust you, that I'm rejecting you, but

please, just listen to me. I can see you bringing your defenses up, you're shutting me out. Please let me talk." He knows that he is being harsh, and slightly unfair. It is his own fault that Hannibal does not trust him after he spent months lying to his face, but Will cannot take the soulless eyes looking back at him anymore. Hannibal does not say anything, which he takes as an invitation to continue.

"I did not want you to know about the scars because I knew you would know exactly how I got them. While your methods are unorthodox, you're still a brilliant psychiatrist, and I know you would want to hurt him. Maybe even kill him." He glances at Hannibal, who is doing a wonderful impression of a statue, cold and unmoving. "I didn't want you to know because it would lead me to confront how I feel about him. I would be forced to pick a side; either defending him or condemning him." His breath shakes, and he feels his hands tremble in his lap. "It would force me to confront the fact that I've been wanting to kill him since I was ten years old." The revelation is clearly unexpected because Hannibal sits up straighter, his eyes flickering. "I want to hurt him, Hannibal, to make him suffer like he made me suffer." The other man is silent for so long that Will begins to think he does not intend to say anything at all, but then he speaks, his voice reverberating through the air.

"The most extreme act of violence one can inflict on oneself is to deny their true nature. Repressing one's identity only allows the wounds to fester within their soul, thus the only way to allow them to heal is to tear open the skin and clean out the debris. Blood is a vital component of our reckoning and without it we would be hollow, devoid of the life that a beating heart carries. We must surmise what to do with the time bestowed upon us, even if the choice is forced by circumstance. To quote Kait Rokowski, 'Nothing ever ends poetically. It ends and we turn it into poetry. All that blood was never once beautiful. It was all just red.' We are a product of the hand dealt to us by the world, but the decision of how to bet on our cards is ours alone." Hannibal finally meets Will's eyes, the red flecks in his irises sparkling in the moonlight.

"The most common retelling of the story of Eve and the Garden of Eden paints the Serpent as the ultimate corrupter of all that is holy, deceiving Eve, and by extension Adam, into consuming the fruit of knowledge, but I do not see it that way. The serpent was a catalyst, an irritant in the reaction of Eve's becoming. He may have tempted her, but Eve took the apple of her own volition, as did Adam. They wanted the power it would grant them, to be equal to God's influence. We are also His creation, and the same desire to influence courses through our veins. It is why so many people have children. They wish to leave their mark on the world just as the world has marked them. I would not implore you to murder your father, Will. I may have my own ideations about him, but the choice is ultimately yours alone. It is your judgment he awaits, not mine," he finishes, and Will feels the dampness around his eyelashes threaten to spill over.

"I often forget you see us as equals," he breathes, choking on the last syllable as a sob escapes his throat. Hannibal places two fingers under Will's chin, exerting just enough pressure to tilt his head up.

"All my life I believed there would be no one else, no one who could challenge me in the ways you have, but now I have you. You are like the sun. Radiant and volatile as you burn, because you do. You burn so brightly, Will." He ghosts his finger over Will's lips, sending

sparks of electricity radiating through Will's body. "I love you beyond reason. I would walk to the ends of the Earth only to hear the echo of your voice, worshiping the ground you had graced with your touch. You have brought me to my knees, I am undone." Hannibal's eyes are shining, flickering with the movement of the clouds in the sky. His sweater looks stuffy, as if it is purposefully trying to suffocate him, which makes Will realize how much he actually hates the thing. The rage he feels toward an insignificant article of clothing is irrational, but it is significant, he thinks. It is not about the sweater itself, but what it represents. He wants to see Hannibal whole, unobscured by disguises. As if of their own volition, his hands grasp the hem of the sweater, and he yanks it upward. Hannibal places a hand on Will's wrist, gently stopping him.

"Will, you are still recovering. In my medical opinion we should not. . ." Will interrupts him before he can finish the sentence.

"I just want to see you, to feel that you are real." This response seems to mollify Hannibal, who allows Will to finish extracting him out of the sweater, which Will throws on the floor in disgust. The act earns him a chuckle from Hannibal, and because he is feeling daring, he pushes him onto his back, surprised at the fact that he is even letting him. Will props himself up on his elbow, lying parallel to Hannibal. They never turned the lights on, but there is a full moon, and it pours through the gaping windows, illuminating them both in a ghostly glow. The angles of Hannibal's face create sharp shadows, causing him to look even more menacing than usual, but what would likely unsettle a normal person only intrigues Will. He wants to commit every line, every wave and crest of Hannibal's face. He lifts his free hand to his face, whispering the tips of his fingers over his cheekbone, testing to see if Hannibal will stop him. He merely closes his eyes, turning his face into Will's touch in silent invitation. Will does not need to be asked twice. He traces the high points of his lover's face, gently caressing the smooth skin stretched over bone. Hannibal has severe features, but there is a distinct beauty to them. Will notices the way they soften beneath his gentle exploration, considering how difficult it would be to commit his image to paper. While he is not an artist himself, he sees how Hannibal's entire face rearranges itself as he goes through different emotions, how he can appear soft and as innocent as he can be one second only for it to be gone the next, transformed by the mask of indifference he wears so often. Will continues his exploration, acting as if this is the last time he will be able to do this, his fingers whispering over Hannibal's brow bone, the low point of his temple, the dip behind where his ear meets his jaw, and the bow of his lips. He whispers so quietly that he is not entirely sure Hannibal will even hear him.

"I am thinking about how you were when we first met. You were such a wall of indifference, every emotion you showed was planned and controlled for in advance. Now, you show your emotions to me so freely, please do not think I have not noticed. I appreciate it, more than I can describe, that you trust me enough to be vulnerable in such a way. I know it is difficult for you." He can see Hannibal open his eyes, pupils gleaming in the darkness, lips parted in rapture at Will's words. Will shifts his weight and presses his lips just below Hannibal's jaw, right at his pulse point. "I adore you, Hannibal. I love you so much. You are mine." He smiles at the sound of Hannibal groaning quietly. "I feel like I forget that you are mortal sometimes, that you are not an invincible, illustrious being." Will trails his fingers downwards until he reaches Hannibal's heart, pressing his hand flat to his sternum and feeling the steady rhythm of his heartbeat beneath his palm. "I meant what I said before. There is no one like you, and

there never will be, ever," he whispers, watching Hannibal's gaze flicker down to his lips and then back to his eyes.

Normally, Hannibal loves to talk, whether he is psychoanalyzing Will's every move or talking about some classical hero, but now he is completely silent, and Will wonders whether he has done something wrong. He furrows his brow, silently prompting the other man to tell him what is on his mind. Hannibal looks almost bashful, which is so out of character that Will frowns. Hannibal lifts a hand, pausing halfway to Will's face, hanging in the empty space between them.

"May I touch you?" he whispers, the words so full of adoration that Will cannot deny him.

"Yes," he says in the same tone, fluttering his eyes closed as Hannibal's hand cups his face. The touch is so tender, practically worshipful in its intensity. The sheer gentleness of it emboldens him, and he tugs his t-shirt over his head, tangling his hair even more than before. Hannibal gazes up at him in wonder.

"Are you certain, Will? I want you to be comfortable," he insists, but Will shakes his head.

"I am comfortable because I am with you," he asserts, discarding the shirt to the floor to make his point. Hannibal smirks, clearly enjoying Will's flair for the dramatic. He looks like he is about to say something but changes his mind at the last second, a shadow of doubt crossing over his features.

"What is it?" queries Will, sinking back onto his haunches.

"Would you like to go outside?" Hannibal answers. "The property is secluded, and it is such a warm evening. We can look out at the ocean together," he adds.

"Actually, I would really like that." Will begins to stand up, but Hannibal stops him.

"Would you object to me carrying you?" he asks, and Will can hear how much he wants it in the inflection of his voice.

"You better not be offering me a piggy-back ride," he quips, desperately trying to break the awkward tension that has sprung up between them. It works, and Hannibal smiles broadly as he leans down to scoop Will up in his arms. Will always knew he was strong, but he lifts him with such ease that Will almost yelps. Instead, he wraps his arms around the older man and nuzzles his head into the crook of Hannibal's neck. Will fights the urge to close his eyes because he wants to see where they are going, marveling at the sleek interior of the house. It is a lot more modern than he would have expected for Hannibal, but he assumes that the location was the main deciding factor.

"This is where I brought Abigail after her attempt," Hannibal whispers, lightly kissing the crown of Will's head. Will expects the mention of Abigail to stir the unpleasant memories within him, but to his surprise, he feels at peace. Sighing contentedly, he hums, the feeling of tranquility spreading through him.

"You have finally forgiven yourself for her death," says Hannibal into the silence. Will does not respond. He knows that the other man understands his need for silence at this moment. They make their way outside, and Will agrees that it is warm, the humid ocean air kissing his skin. He feels himself being lowered to the ground, the light tickle of grass on his spine, and he sits up to find that they are perched on the ledge of a cliff, suspended over the roiling sea below them. Growing up in Louisiana, all of the beaches he was used to had soft, powdery, white sand and warm water. The ocean below the cliff side here in Maryland is an entirely contrary experience. He can hear the rush of the water, slamming against the jagged rocks at the bottom of the bluff. He can smell the distinct scent of the sea, laden with brine and life. He can feel the stickiness of the humid air, covering his hair in a thin film of salt. He closes his eyes, basking in the overwhelming presence of the ocean.

"I see why you bought this place," he says, turning to face Hannibal. "The ocean is the perfect antithesis, just like you. It is simultaneously a quiet, steady presence and a violent, raging storm. It harbors both darkness and light, waxing and waning in its intensity. I'm surprised I haven't made the connection until now. If you say I am the sun, then you are like the sea."

They sit in companionable silence for a while, too captivated by the moment to keep track of time. Will glances over his shoulder to find Hannibal staring at him, utterly enraptured. A while ago, Will would have been unsettled, but now all he can feel is the adoration that radiates off of Hannibal. He inches closer to the other man, touching their knees together to sit side by side. He peers at him from beneath his eyelashes, eyes flickering to Will's lips. When Will does not back down, He leans forward and presses his lips to Will's. Their mouths are slightly sticky from the sea breeze, but neither of them seem to care. Will snakes a hand in Hannibal's hair, gently tugging at the roots, earning a gasp from the older man. Hannibal gathers him in his arms, hoisting him onto his lap as if he weighs nothing. Will obliges, swinging his leg over to straddle him, slanting his mouth against his to deepen the kiss. Will can feel hands on his back, barely touching him, as if asking for permission. He parts their mouths just enough to mutter his approval.

"Yes," he breathes, "touch me, please." The brush of Hannibal's fingertips over his spine is electrifying, and he shivers into the touch. Hannibal grins in satisfaction, caressing the jagged skin right below his scapula. Will's immediate reaction is to stiffen, but Hannibal holds him steady, continuing the gentle inspection of his scars until he is able to relax again.

"Breathe, mylimasis. You are safe here," he says, sparks dancing behind his eyes. Will finally gives into the desire of what he has been waiting all evening to do and lowers himself to be flush with Hannibal's chest, allowing the older man to hold his weight. He tucks his head under Hannibal's chin, sighing contently when the grip around him tightens. This territory is familiar, previously established. He has let Hannibal hold him like this before, but never skin to skin in the way they are now. He feels as if they remained here long enough they would fuse into one, bodies melding together.

"When I was still planning to entrap you, I wondered if we could survive separation," Will murmurs into his chest. "I think I know the answer to that now." Hannibal hums, the sound reverberating through his rib cage. "I feel as if I could swallow you whole." Will is unsure of how the other man will take this admission, and to his relief, it does not phase him at all.

"Are you familiar with the myth of Achilles and Patroclus, aside from what we discussed in my office?" he asks.

"Yes, I actually looked it up when I got home. Historians often say that they were friends, but they were lovers, right?" He cannot move his arms because Hannibal is holding him so tightly, but he secretly likes the temporary loss of autonomy. It makes him feel safe, as if for these few moments he does not have to watch his back.

"Yes, they were. I only ask because your words reminded me of a passage from the Iliad." He drags his fingernails against Will's skin, lightly scratching at the nape of his neck. Will arches into the touch, completely besotted. "Achilles was devastated by the loss of his dear Patroclus. He lost himself in the requisite of revenge, even besting a God in his pursuit of Hector. When he finally catches his adversary, he spoke in kind: 'I wish only that my spirit and fury would drive me to hack your meat away and eat it raw for the things that you have done to me.' He referenced Omophagia, or 'raw-eating', which is the act of eating meat raw, and it often includes cannibalism. Civilized societies were supposed to cook their meat, so someone who ate their meat raw was either a wild animal or a vengeful God. In saying that he would eat Hector's meat raw, Achilles was forsaking his humanity. Have you given up your humanity, Will?"

"Only as much as you have given up yours," he confides. Curiosity gets the better of him, so he asks, unsure of what he actually wants to hear in response. "If I died, and the opportunity arose, would you eat me?" He can feel Hannibal's muscles stiffen beneath him. "I want to know, please be honest with me," he adds, smoothing his fingers over Hannibal's collarbone. They lay in silence together for a few breaths, the crashing waves the only sound around them. Will begins to drift off, certain that he does not intend to answer at all, but then he feels Hannibal press his lips to the crown of his head and murmur a single syllable into his hair.

"Yes."

Chapter End Notes

I of course had to include a reference to Achilles and Patroclus because it's basically required when writing Hannigram. The quote I used is actually from the Iliad, which I definitely recommend. It's not necessarily the most beautiful writing, but there is so much and the stories and characters are so rich that sitting through page-long descriptions every chapter is worth it. In case you don't want to read the Iliad but want more content about Achilles and Patroclus, I definitely recommend "The Song of Achilles" (yes, English teacher, I know it should be italicized because it's a novel, but AO3 won't let me do that in the ANs so please leave me alone lol). The language is beautiful and the story is absolutely heartbreaking.

Teacups and Time

Chapter Notes

I'm not entirely satisfied with this chapter, but I'm so exhausted that I'm posting it as is. I edited the last chapter because there were a few errors, but nothing to change the plot so if you noticed that some of the grammar was off or that I was repeating the word "Hannibal" way too much, you were indeed correct.

If I'm being entirely honest, I am struggling with writing the next chapter. It requires a bit of a time jump and I hate summarizing. If you couldn't tell, my favorite things to write are philosophical discussions, allusions, and anything medical related, so since the next chapter isn't really any of those things, I'm in a bit of a slump. This is absolutely terrible because I really need to finish this fic this week because after this I will be mostly out of commission until the end of May.

On a more positive note, I committed to college a few days ago!

Sorry for the rambling, and thank you so much for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes up to find himself entangled in the same quilt from before with Hannibal nowhere to be found. This does not surprise him as he looks out the window to find that the sun is shining, mid-morning sunlight spilling onto the sheets. In the daylight, he notices that the room is larger than he first thought, with a small fireplace decorating one of the walls, tufted chairs stationed beside it. The atmosphere is warm, golden even, with the honey-lacquered furniture and the sunlight illuminating the cream-colored walls. Flinging his legs over the side of the bed, he walks into the en-suite to find a neat pile of clothes in his size. Smiling to himself at Hannibal's antics, he sheds his remaining clothes and steps onto the cool tile of the shower. The warmth of his bedroom–he knows that it is meant to be his–does not permeate into the bathroom, but he enjoys the slight chill on his skin, and the prickling sensation of goosebumps forming. The cold also means that the warmth of the spray feels even better, relaxing his stiff muscles. He allows himself to drift, basking in the knowledge that he is finally safe, that he is loved and cherished, and that he loves.

He rubs his fingers together, feeling the ridges where the tips have pruned in response to the water. Accepting this as his signal that he has been in the shower long enough, he shuts the water off, taking care to ensure he does not drip water all over the floor. Will never saw the sense in buying overpriced towels, but they feel soft and pillowy on his skin, so if Hannibal wants to buy them he is not going to complain. He reaches for the pile of clothes and notices how reminiscent they are of what he wore after he went back to therapy with Hannibal after being acquitted. It dawns on him that Hannibal must have purchased the clothes before everything came crashing down, and it fills him with sadness, thinking about what might

have been. He forces himself to stop. That was the past and there is nothing he can do to change it now. But would he have acted differently? If he could go back and change things? No, he decides. Everything that happened between them had been preordained. His fall was not an accident, he was destined for this life.

His stomach rumbles, ruining the moment of introspection. It dawns on him that he has not eaten anything since two evenings ago, and that the dull ache in his abdomen is not supposed to be there. He quickly towel dries his hair, allowing the ringlets to arrange themselves, and walks out into the hallway. The sound of classical music grows louder as he makes his way to the living room. He pauses to listen, noting how mournful it sounds, as if the organ itself is crying. He sweeps his eyes across the room, glimpsing Hannibal sitting in an armchair, a glass of wine discarded on the coffee table. At first he thinks that the man is reading the book resting in his hand, but upon further scrutiny he sees that his eyes are closed. He appears so peaceful there, head tilted up slightly and the sunlight dancing across his face. Unwilling to disturb him, Will stands there, marveling at the opportunity to just watch him like this. Hannibal opens his eyes, the rest of him entirely still. The motion is unsettling, a glimpse of the predator that he is, but Will smiles regardless.

"What are you listening to?" he asks, stepping closer to him until the tips of his feet are inches away from the base of the chair. "It sounds so sad." Hannibal gazes up at him, his eyelashes brushing the skin beneath his eyebrows.

"It is intended to be so. *Lacrimosa*, derived from the title 'Our Lady of Sorrows', often delineating the Virgin Mary, is Latin for tearful. 'Lacrimosa dies illa' means 'day of tears', which is a component of a Requiem Mass. The mass is offered as a repose for the deceased, allowing them to finally rest," he explains, lost in thought. "The *Dies Irae* is notably more well known, having become a motif for death in many works, musical or otherwise, but *Lacrimosa* will always be more evocative for me." He springs to his feet, not a trace of his former pensiveness left on his face. "You must be starving, come to the kitchen so I may feed you."

Will trails behind him, taking in how empty the walls feel. Hannibal's house in Baltimore was filled to the brim with various art and decorations, and their own house in Italy was covered in small trinkets Will made or Hannibal bought at the market, so the contrast is stark.

"I had been hoping to decorate it with you at the time, but obviously I had not controlled for every possible outcome," voices Hannibal wistfully. "It feels strange now, being here with you after I had spent so long imagining it. It is like I am looking in the mirror of my past, but the image is curved and distorted." He glides around the kitchen, spooning rice into a bowl and lifting the lid of a large pot. The smell of parsley, thyme, and Cajun seasoning wafts through the air as he ladles the contents of the pot over the rice, setting the plate before Will.

"You made me gumbo?" Will asks incredulously. "I didn't take you for having a taste for southern food."

"You are correct that it is not typically in my repertoire, but I thought you might enjoy it," he responds. Will realizes belatedly that Hannibal wants to make him feel at home, and his heart melts.

"Thank you," he says, taking a bite. He allows the flavors to melt on his tongue, the level of spice exactly how he likes it. "It's delicious," he adds, a warm feeling spreading through his insides. Hannibal smiles, one of the rare ones that shows his teeth. Will thinks that he looks a little bit like a cat, but he knows the other man would roll his eyes at the comparison. He finishes eating, Hannibal peering at him from across the table the entire time.

"Would you like some tea, Will?" he finally asks. Will has always been more of a coffee person, but he feels compelled to oblige Hannibal's need to take care of him.

"That would be great, actually," Will responds. Hannibal grins at him, clearly invigorated by the task at hand. Will expects Hannibal's tea to be fancy, but he wonders if the man has gone a bit too over the top when he sees him add fresh rosemary, slices of ginger, grapefruit, pomegranate seeds, and a splash of raspberry syrup. Will wonders how he even managed to acquire such fresh ingredients since as far as he is concerned, they have only been here for the later part of the day and the night. He voices his musings aloud, and Hannibal looks at him with a light air of surprise.

"I did not realize that you do not know, although I suppose I should not be surprised," he answers, mixing in a dollop of honey into the tea. "You asked a lot of your body that day."

"Know what?" Will asks, brow furrowing in confusion.

"We have been here for two nights. You slept through the entire first day, waking only in the late evening and then falling asleep after a few hours." So that's why Hannibal was so hesitant that evening, Will thinks.

"Oh my God, I completely forgot that I fell asleep on top of you." He drops his head, rubbing his hands over his face in embarrassment. "Thanks for bringing me back inside," he adds, a tinge of melancholy in his voice.

"It was no trouble, Will, truly. In fact, I must admit that I found it rather endearing." He hands the cup of tea to Will. "You always acted so reserved and closed off in the past, so to see you be comfortable in such a way, it delights me more than I can express." Will's cheeks warm slightly, which he convinces himself is a result of the steam rising up out of his mug. He lifts it to his lips, the warmth of the liquid blooming in his mouth. Initially, he thought that the seemingly random ingredients would be overwhelming, a cacophony of flavors battling for dominance, but they work surprisingly well together. There is a complexity to the tea. It feels hearty, filled with life. It makes him want to curl up by a fire, listening only to the sounds of the world around him.

They finish their tea in silence, which Will finds strangely comforting. Personally, he loves the silence. It lets him think, breathe, without worrying about social expectations or judgmental glares. He never understood why others abhor it so fervently, why they feel the need to fill it with mindless chatter and false smiles. The sound of Hannibal's chair sliding on the floor echoes loudly as the man reaches over to pluck the cup out of Will's hand. Will catches his wrist, holding Hannibal in place.

"Will you play the piano for me?" With the house so empty, the grand piano in the living room caught Will's eye in particular, reminding him of how he used to tinker in his workshop.

He can see that the request takes Hannibal by surprise, his eyes narrowing a fraction, so he releases his grip, but Hannibal does not lower his hand. Instead, he offers it to Will, as if asking him to dance.

"And what would you have me play?" he asks.

"Do you know 'Clair de Lune'?" Will takes Hannibal's hand, rising to his feet. Hannibal discards their mugs on the table, clearly deeming the matter of less importance.

"Of course, it is a quintessential piece for any experienced pianist." He leads Will into the living room and softly presses a kiss to his cheek. "If I may ask, why 'Claire de Lune'?" he queries, letting go of Will's hand to pull the bench out.

"I never really listened to classical music as a kid, but I spent a lot of my time at the library. My father always had something for me to do, so the library was the only place I could have some time to myself and do what I wanted. The librarian was a sweet older lady, always wearing butterfly prints," he chuckles at the fond memory. "She noticed how I would spend my days reading alone and took it upon herself to make sure I got at least one warm meal each day I was there. At first, I did not want to rely on her charity, but she kept bringing food for me even if I did not eat it. It was going to waste, so I made an exception. She died a few months after I met her, and it was so long ago, but I will never forget that her favorite piece was 'Clair de Lune.'" He rests one hand on the lacquered wood of the piano, marveling at the beauty of the instrument. He does not need to play to know that it is a work of art. "I never told anyone about her," he adds, voice dropping to a whisper.

"She sounds like a delightful woman. What was her name?" Hannibal lifts the fallboard, exposing the glistening ivory keys to the light.

"Layla," whispers Will.

"To Layla, then." Hannibal places his hands on the keys, touching them as if they are made of glass, and begins to play. The opening is slow and dreamy, like walking on a deserted beach in the dark, but then the crescendo builds, and Hannibal's skill is palpable not only in how he holds the notes for the exact amount of time, or how he flawlessly transitions the arpeggios, but in how he feels the music. The notes float in the air like dancers, every bit a part of the performance. Hannibal himself is also a sight to behold, his fingers flying over the keys with an elegant grace Will could only dream of possessing. A few strands of his hair have come undone in the process, obscuring his forehead slightly. Will fights the urge to brush them away, afraid that the action would ruin the image before him and that it would disappear like a mirage in the sun. He loses himself in the music instead, letting the notes fill his head and tear apart his senses. The experience is incendiary, like the gurgling tide crashing onto the rocks at the base of the bluff. The last note draws out, fading until it becomes more silence than sound.

"I feel like I have not heard you truly play until now," Will says finally, breaking the spell. Hannibal shifts to gaze up at him, tilting his head up and to the side.

"Although it is more famously known as a piece of music, the original 'Clair de Lune' is a poem written by Paul Verlaine," he pauses, features arranging themselves into the

contemplative look Will often sees him wear. "*Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur*." His eyes meet Will's again. "They seem not to believe in their own happiness," he translates. "Are you happy, Will?" Will stares at him, mouth curling in disbelief.

"How can you even ask that, after all we've been through? Of course I'm happy. Are you not?" He places his hand on his shoulder, fingers digging into the flesh there.

"I am, more than I have words to describe," he mutters, leaning into the touch even though Will knows the grip must be painful.

"I can't help but feel like that sentence is missing the disclaimer you intended for it," Will accuses and presses his fingers harder.

"I am wary to trouble you with it, Will, given the ordeal you went through less than 72 hours ago." Will hangs his head, letting go of Hannibal's shoulder.

"Hannibal," he breathes. "What is it going to take for us to be honest with each other. You've tried to kill me, drugged me, broken me out of the hospital. I killed our daughter, I ran away with you to Europe, what more do we have? What more could you possibly ask for?" Hannibal tries to grab his hand but he shakes him off and turns to walk away.

"Will." It is only one word, but the way Hannibal says stops him in his tracks. His voice is thready, on the verge of sounding pained. "Come back to me." Will curses his feet as they begin to walk back to the man. Hannibal has turned around on the bench, and Will towers over him, casting a shadow over his face. "I am not discounting the pain you suffered when you were sick. You lost your sense of self, your grasp on what was real and what was not, but you were also in a coma for months. What was weeks for you was months for me, Will. You did not share the experience of stumbling across your limp body on the frosty ground. You did not feel me abandoning you on the side of the road by the hospital. Forgive me if I am hesitant to believe that happiness is something we can have." The anguish on his face is so intense, and Will aches that he cannot reach within him and tear it out. Hannibal turns his head, and Will spots the glimmer of tears, barely visible in the corners of his eyes. He knows there is nothing he can say that will make it alright, because it really is not alright. He knows that his encephalitis could come back and what then? Jack knows now, he will be carting Will off to police custody the second he is found. They could slip up, be caught, and then they would be separated and likely sentenced to death depending on the evidence they found.

Instead of voicing what they are both painfully aware of, he sits on the edge of the bench, their thighs pressed together. He opens his arms and Hannibal falls into them, burying his face in his chest. He clings onto Will as if he is afraid that the younger man will be ripped away by some invisible force, and Will simply holds him, running the palms of his hands gently over his back and whispering platitudes into his hair. Hannibal only wraps his arms around him tighter, almost making it difficult for Will to breathe, but he would not let go for the world.

"I meant what I told Jack the other day," he murmurs. "If anyone tries to take you from me, I will kill them." The words clearly strike a nerve in Hannibal because he begins to sob, his shoulders quivering. Will lifts a hand to smooth his hair, kissing the crown of his head. "Shhhhh, it's alright. I'm here. I'm here." He feels him melt in his arms, and the sobs die down

slowly. Hannibal eventually extracts himself from Will's chest, leaving the front of Will's shirt damp with his tears.

"When I was lying by your side that first night you went into the coma, I begged God. I pleaded with Him not to take you from me, telling him that he already has Mischa and that taking you too would break me. Will, if I lost you, I do not know where I would be, who I would become." Will swipes his thumb over Hannibal's cheek, brushing away the tear tracks.

"He won't have me because you won't let Him," he soothes, continuing the stroking motion over his skin. Hannibal lowers his eyes, as if catching onto a fleeting thought.

"I am sorry, Will. I feel as if I should be the one offering you comfort, not the other way around. You are still recovering." He stiffens slightly under Will's touch, drawing back into himself.

"Hey, just because I'm recovering doesn't mean you aren't allowed to feel your emotions. I would rather you share them with me so that we can work through them than to leave them to yourself, allowing them to fester. I know trust is difficult for you, and my past actions have contributed to that, but I'm here now, and we are here together." The stiffness fades, and he sees Hannibal return to him, the red flecks in his eyes sparkling under the sunlight. "I was going to wait to ask, but in the spirit of being open and honest, I think now might be as good a time as any," he says, and he sees the intrigue in Hannibal's expression, how his eyes crease and his eyebrows raise fractionally. "Would you like to meet my father?" The question is clearly the last thing Hannibal was expecting, and Will can see the flicker of shock in his eyes.

"Are you asking me if I want to kill him or if I want to hold a conversation?" he asks, straightening his back and squaring his shoulders. Will sighs.

"I haven't decided yet," he admits. "Do you want to kill him?" Hannibal tilts his head, as if thinking deeply about the answer, but Will can tell he already knows exactly what he wants to say.

"I must admit that I do want to kill him very much, but I value your opinion in this more than my desire for his death. If you do not want me to touch him, I promise I will not." Will is not surprised by the admission. After all, Hannibal has known about his scars for a while now and has had ample time to consider his thoughts on the matter.

"I don't know exactly what I want to do, but I want to talk to him. I have not seen him in so long, but I feel like I need closure on the subject. Maybe I want to know why he did what he did. It doesn't really matter, all I know is that I want you to come with me," he says.

"If that is what you wish, then we will go."

Chapter End Notes

The tea Hannibal makes is an actual recipe that I make during the winter and fall months. It is absolutely delicious, and I always make it with earl grey or english breakfast, but any black tea works well. If you happen to live in a country that has Costa Coffee chains, they might have it there. Here is a picture of what the tea looks like: https://pliki.portalspozywczy.pl/i/07/99/92/079992_r0_940.jpg

A Hill of Crosses

Chapter Notes

> Ahhhh sorry this chapter is a day late. This week hit me like a freight train. I usually write a day ahead so that if anything happens I am able to still post on time, but so much happened that I wasn't able to. I'm going to spare you the boring details, but basically I've been really stressed about meeting deadlines and getting everything I need to do finished on time. This chapter is low-key filler and exposition, so I'm sorry about that.

The next few weeks go by in a blur. Will does not want to stay in the cliff side house. As much as he loves the roaring sea and the land, it is far too close to Quantico for his taste. Hannibal has no objections as the modern style is not his favorite. He has various properties all over the world, so they can go wherever they wish.

"We can always decide after we find your father," he tells him.

Usually, Will would balk at such an unknown, but he feels oddly comforted by it now. His entire demeanor and outlook on life has changed after his escape from the hospital. They will always be hunted, and there is nothing they can do about it. He wants to live his life without constantly looking over his shoulder to see the target on his back. He wants to love Hannibal in every way he can. He wants closure for himself, which is why they are going. Hannibal has been working his magic and procuring false documents and paperwork seemingly out of thin air. Apparently, the location was not the only thing that drew the older man to this house. Will has spent hours uncovering and exploring the various secret compartments and passages built into it, marveling at how well they are camouflaged in the structure of the building.

While Hannibal is consumed with securing the means for their journey, Will finds himself tasked with tracking down his father, which is much easier said than done. He moved around a lot as a child, never staying in one place too long. Perhaps it was part of why he was such a social recluse in his early years–not that anything has really changed–but he knows that it was not the true reason. There is no single property for Will to trace back to, no family ties to uncover. He feels as if he has found a dead end as his search is at a complete standstill. It is not until a conversation with Hannibal that he finally moves past the roadblock.

They are huddled by the fire in Will's bedroom, if it can even be called that because they have slept in the same bed ever since he woke up the second time around. The firelight dances across the walls, painting them in a menacing glow. They moved the tufted chairs to the other side of the room, leaving the floor space beside the fire empty, and covered the floor in blankets and pillows. It reminds Will of all the forts he never got to build as a kid. He is lying parallel to the mantle, his head resting on Hannibal's chest as they watch the fire flicker and crack together. Recently, there have been so many of these quiet moments of intimacy. A brief kiss on the cheek, a steadying hand on a shoulder, fingers ruffling through his hair, but

there's been more too. It feels new, foreign, wanting more and being able to have it, but for the moment they are both too tired for anything else.

"I'm having trouble finding him," Will whispers into the fabric of Hannibal's shirt. "I don't even know where to start looking." Hannibal begins twirling his hair around his fingers, seemingly contemplative about the subject. Will knows his hair is going to stick out at strange angles, but he does not particularly care.

"That is because you are treating him as if he does not want to be found," he finally says. "He is not a criminal on the run from the law. You have not kept contact with him for decades. I hardly imagine he behaves as a man on the run." The fingers stroking through his hair increase their pressure, massaging his scalp slightly. "You know him, Will. Where would he want to spend his golden years?" The answer that was originally so elusive to him finally comes to light, and it is so painfully obvious that he cannot believe he missed it. He feels Hannibal smile at his realization, continuing his perusal of Will's head.

"How do you do it?" he asks, genuine curiosity in his voice as he tilts his head up to look at Hannibal. "How do you get me to see things so clearly. It's like you command the rippling water of my mind to be still."

"Your mind is brilliant, Will. You see so many positives, an endless trove of possibilities. Oftentimes all I need to do is show you what something is not. Providing the negative allows you to see the positive." He lifts his head slightly to meet Will's eyes, his hand traveling under his shirt to caress the divot of his spine.

"Just like what you did with Cassie Boyle," Will breathes, leaning into the touch.

"Yes," he agrees, and Will cannot help but laugh at the unabashed nature of how he treats this as if it is normal. "I helped you see his face, the same with your father." Will considers this, lowering his head back down to Hannibal's chest and tracing small circles on the space just below his collarbone.

"Although I'm not sure if I actually want to see his face. It's more of a need to close something that I left open, if that makes sense," he clarifies.

"We all have a desire to finish chapters in our autobiographies, not leave them open to interpretation. Endings have a finality to them, and being the cause of that ending can make us feel powerful." His hand is warm along Will's back, encompassing him in a feeling of comfort. He has always traveled from one place to another, and now will likely be no different, but finally he has a place to call home. Anywhere where he can be with Hannibal is home. "You do not have to kill your father to be free of him," says the older man after a pause, "although there likely would be therapeutic value for you in the act."

"Must you always speak in metaphors and riddles?" Will teases, snarkily tucking away a strand of Hannibal's hair. "I feel like I have never heard you cuss before."

"How insolent you are," Hannibal chuckles, clearly entertained by this change in conversation. "Besides, how would you even know that I have not? As far as I am concerned, you do not speak French, Italian, German, or Lithuanian."

"Forgive me if the American education system has left me lacking in the world language department. I took 2 years of Spanish in high school, and I barely remember it. Being fluent in a language requires actually speaking to people, and if you couldn't tell. . ." he trails off for dramatic effect. "Anyway, you should teach me some curse words in all the languages you speak. That way I can advertise my unfriendliness right off the bat and skip the awkward introduction stage."

"You truly are a terror, mylimasis. Your impudence is ghastly," Hannibal chides, feigning outrage. Will seizes the opportunity to scramble on top of him, pinning Hannibal's legs with his knees and holding on to his wrists. He leans over him, noses almost touching.

"Yeah, it really sucks for you that you're stuck with me. Better luck next time." He smirks when he hears the faint hitch in Hannibal's breath. "Because you're mine," he concludes, covering Hannibal's mouth with his.

The car ride to New Orleans from Baltimore is long to say the least. On average, it should be about 18 hours without stopping, but with all the detours they take, it is a painstaking process. Thankfully, Hannibal prepared a cooler of food to take with them, which, to Will's delight, includes a rather large assortment of sandwiches. He is in the middle of devouring a particularly delicious one: rye bread, filled with avocado, pickles, and mystery meat Hannibal calls "*paštetas*". The older man insists it is only a mix of chicken and pork liver, but Will is unconvinced.

"Whatever it is, it's great, and you should make it more often," he mumbles with his mouth full, which prompts Hannibal to make a show of rolling his eyes.

"If I am being honest, I did not think you would like Lithuanian food. Most Americans tend to dislike Eastern European cuisine." He keeps his eyes on the road, shaking his head in defeat when Will continues to demolish the sandwich. Will decides to take the time to chew and swallow properly this time, his tone much more serious.

"Is that why you never made Lithuanian food at your dinner parties? You didn't think people would like it?"

"It was a factor, yes, but the main reason was that I did not want to share a part of myself so entwined with my past with anyone. I doubt you have forgotten that socialization and friendship were not among my interior goals for those events, so it seemed superfluous to process the memories tied with many of my favorite dishes for the sake of them," he explains, and Will detects a hint of sadness in the twitch of his nose. "Not to mention that *cepelinai*, *saltibarsciai*, and *bulviniai blynai* do not exactly align with the image I was trying to project at the time."

"You could cook it for me," Will encourages. "I would love to try it. I don't know if I'd be much help, but I would even make it with you if you let me."

"I would love nothing more than to cook with you, Will." The joy in his voice is obvious, its rich undertones brightening.

They exit the highway at a mid-sized exit. Will insisted that they would not stay at any motels on the way, explaining that he did not want to risk anyone seeing them, which means that they have to take turns driving. It is nearing the end of the day, and the sun is starting to set, painting the sky in a medley of fiery hues. Hannibal parks the car in a lot near a train station. The hustle and bustle of people there will mask their presence, and being out late in the evening will be less noticeable. Although Hannibal had another car hidden in the cliff house, they both decided that the Acura would be more appropriate given its larger trunk space and age. It would be counterproductive if someone tried to steal their car or break in to look for valuables.

Hannibal gets out of the car first, stretching his legs and enjoying the light breeze signifying the beginning of Fall. Will follows him shortly after, having taken a minute to finish his sandwich. It will be his turn to drive now that they are almost to New Orleans. Although he did not stay there for long, his most vivid memories of his childhood are from the city. Most of them are whispers, glimpses of a half-formed moment, the flutter of a touch here and there. Perhaps it is that he does not want to remember, but he does. He remembers vividly. The pangs of hunger, the tenderness of freshly-formed bruises, the slippery texture of his blood. Red, so much red. Will shakes his head, dissipating the unpleasant thoughts.

"Will." The single syllable grounds him back into reality, and he opens his eyes to find Hannibal running his thumb over his knuckles, a look of concern in his eyes. "Are you alright?"

"I was just thinking," he responds, avoiding lying directly, but not exactly divulging the truth either. At Hannibal's raised eyebrow, Will sighs in exasperation. "I was remembering what my life was like when I lived here."

"Remember that we do not have to stay. We can leave anytime you want." The answer is exactly what Will expected, and it angers him. He is not here only for himself, he is here for Hannibal too, although to be fair, the man does not know it yet, so he cannot be too upset.

"Look, Hannibal, I know I should have told you earlier, but I didn't really know how, so I'm telling you now," Will turns his head away, unable to meet his eyes. "I'm sorry I kept it from you. You deserve to know." Hannibal stiffens so slightly that almost anybody would never notice even if they were looking for it, but Will is not anybody, and he does notice. "I'm not only here because I want closure," he explains. "I'm here because I want him to meet you." The words fall heavily between them, and Will wants to fling himself off a cliff. Hannibal remains silent for an interlude, causing him to begin serious consideration on where the nearest cliffs could be, but then Hannibal speaks.

"You want to introduce me to your father?" he asks carefully.

"I want him to know," Will whispers, words barely audible in the heightening wind. "That it is not just you and me, but us. Together." Hannibal presses his fingers under his chin, forcing him to look at him.

"It is a riveting thing, the need to be seen," he says. "Am I correct in assuming he will not be pleased?"

"'Not pleased' would not even begin to describe it." Will's voice is pained, and Hannibal pulls him into his arms, cradling Will's head against his chest. "I understand if you don't want to come anymore," he murmurs, the words stifled by Hannibal's shirt.

"I would not miss it for the world, my love." He holds Will closer to him still, and Will is encompassed in a flood of warmth. They stand there, pressed against each other in the moonlit night, sharing the same breath.

It is Will's turn to drive, but Hannibal does not take the opportunity to speak. Will always suspected that between Hannibal's career, personal hobbies, and murderous escapades, the man barely slept, and he was satisfied to find that he was correct. Although they mostly fall asleep together, he often finds the other side of the bed empty by the time he wakes up in the morning. Hannibal has no qualms about sitting still for long periods of time, but even with that, he is always doing something, composing music or strolling around the halls of his mind.

"Where are you now?" Will asks, tilting his chin to the side in curiosity. Hannibal considers for a moment, his blank eyes signifying that he is somewhere else entirely.

"The Norman Chapel in Palermo, Italy," he finally says. "You are with me." Will nods, humming softly.

"The heart of your memory palace," he breathes.

"Yes, but this is not a memory, although I have visited many times, the most recent being when I left you at the hospital. I had not intended for you to be recovered by the FBI so quickly." Aside from a few snippets here and there, Hannibal has not mentioned how he spent his time while Will was in a coma, and Will cannot help but be intrigued. "I lit the candles for you, although it was more a symbol of solidarity than an actual prayer to God. I would like to see it with you one day, if you would be so inclined." Will feels as if there is more to this than Hannibal is saying, but he does not press further.

"We can go wherever we want in the world, and if you want to go with me, then I will gladly come with you," he responds. It is difficult to not know what the other man is thinking. Usually, he is able to read anyone as if the words are being stamped onto their forehead in real time, but with Hannibal it is different. He cannot read him like he can everyone else, his emotions closed off, like an invisible cloud that obscures and refracts. "We are almost there," he adds, clumsily changing the subject.

"And where is it that we are going? You have kept those details private." His tone is not accusatory, merely stating a fact. Besides, it is true. Will has told him practically nothing of

what, where, when, and why they are here.

"I have not been there in decades," he supplies. "We are going to see my mother."

"I was under the impression that your mother was dead." Hannibal furrows his brow in confusion.

"Oh, she is. I mean we are going to visit her grave. I never knew her since she died shortly after I was born, but my father loved her. I think he's been visiting her." It is late at night now, and the road is practically devoid of life.

"So the rags and cleaning supplies you packed are for?" Hannibal asks.

"Well we can't just wait at her grave for him to show up. He'd scramble out of there the second he saw me alone, much less you. No, we can't meet him out in the open. I intend to follow him home instead." The road curves, and their heads tilt at the force of it. "The supplies are there so that we can find an old abandoned grave and busy ourselves cleaning it. That way we can keep a lookout without looking suspicious."

"And you are sure he will be there today?"

"It's Sunday. If there's a day he's visiting her, it's going to be today." Will is sure of it. His father may never have understood him, but he understands his father more than he himself ever could.

They continue driving in silence, Hannibal strolling around in his mind palace, and Will zoning out as he continues driving through the night. They arrive at the graveyard before the strokes of color appear in the sky, most of the parking lot still deserted. Will gathers his supplies in a small orange bucket, slipping on a thin jacket to ward off the chill morning wind. Hannibal combs through one of the black duffel bags he brought with them, extracting a set of small knives and pocketing a selection of them. He hands a folding knife to Will, who takes it without question this time. Defending themselves will always be a priority, and he would rather be prepared for anything. He looks at the twin bags, and they glare back, as if taunting him. Hannibal said that they were for first aid, but he cannot imagine how first aid supplies, even ones as extensive as Hannibal's, could fill up two large bags. He decides not to ask about it. There are more pressing tasks at hand.

Being in possession of a near-perfect memory can be seen as both a blessing and a curse, but Will is thankful for it now, as finding the correct grave takes barely any time at all. As he expected, the tombstone is scrubbed clean, a shriveled bouquet of flowers adorning the slab of stone covering the entrance. It is old enough to not be new, but fresh enough to have been placed here relatively recently. Will grins at the array, the state of it screaming at him that all of his assumptions have been correct.

"Julia Graham. *Curly-haired*," elucidates Hannibal, reading the chiseled letters. The sun has begun to rise, bathing the tallest structures in a golden paint. The stone appears gilded, drenched in the light of dawn. Will does not respond. He scrutinizes the grave, as if searching for some hidden detail he cannot quite place.

"I don't feel anything," he says at last. "It's so surreal. I'm standing above the grave of my own dead mother, and it means nothing to me."

"You never knew her, Will. She never got the chance to place her mark on you. She may live inside of you, genetically speaking, but all of those memories most cherish are not something you have the privilege of possessing. Do not mourn your lack of emotion. She will be remembered by those that loved her, and you were never given the opportunity to be one of them." Hannibal is standing a few feet behind him, but the distance feels much greater than that. Will rubs his eyes, trying to remove the tiredness by sheer force of will.

"Let's go," he says with finality. "We have work to do."

Will finds an inconspicuous grave about a row back. The tombstones will offer them some cover, but still allow them to keep an eye out. The grave they chose is long overgrown with mosses, the once off-white stone a rotten green. No one has visited for years, which means that no one will notice or care that they are cleaning it. Hannibal goes to get water from the faucet, leaving Will to continue hunting their quarry. He fumbles with the tools and absent-mindedly selects a small, angled scraper. He finds comfort in monotonous work like this, as it grants him the freedom to leave his body on autopilot and focus on other more important issues. Perhaps that is why it took him so long to notice he was losing time during his first episode of encephalitis. Back then, he spent almost every waking moment in his head. All the necessities of the human body were seen to with a clinical detachment and the pleasures discarded as completely unnecessary, so meeting Hannibal was like being thrown into a world where everything was reversed. Suddenly, he knew a person who made fancy coffee in a fancy french press just because it tasted better than the generic brand instant mix. Hannibal says that a significant part of why he felt so hesitant to take care of himself was because he thought he was undeserving of good things, that denying himself comfort would soften the blow if he ever found himself in a place without it. He supposes there is some truth to it, definitely more than he would ever admit aloud. While he doubts that he will ever enjoy luxurious things to the extent that Hannibal does, owning shirts that do not irritate his skin and drinking coffee that actually tastes good is nice.

He looks down at his work to find most of the large chunks of moss scraped away and curses himself for not paying attention. It would be lamentable for them to have come all this way just for him to miss the one lead that they have. Hannibal returns with the bucket of water and begins to lather soap onto a brush. It is still very early in the morning, so they are the only ones here. He begins at the spot Will has cleared of the largest pieces of moss, working the solution into the stone, the slightly porous texture unwilling to let go of the grime that has accumulated over the years.

"No luck yet?" Hannibal queries, obviously knowing the answer but asking regardless.

"I thought you disliked pointless questions? Didn't you say it is a waste of good oxygen?" Will continues scraping away at the tombstone, casting quick glances in the direction of his mother's grave.

"Something like that," Hannibal chuckles. "I must say, this cemetery is quite captivating. There is something magical about it, especially in the growing light of the rising sun."

"New Orleans definitely has its unique charm. I never really got to enjoy it though, but maybe I would have if I had the opportunity," he says, thinking back to his childhood.

"This place reminds me of *Kryžių Kalnas*, the Hill of Crosses." Hannibal is wearing that slightly sad, longing look Will has been noticing more and more often. He wishes he knew what it means, but he also is unwilling to ask, afraid of pushing where he should not. He makes a humming sound instead, urging Hannibal to explain further. "When Russia parted the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth near the end of the 18th century, claiming Lithuania as part of the Russian Empire, people began uprising, albeit unsuccessfully. Families would often be unable to locate bodies of dead rebels, so they began erecting crosses in their honor at the site of an old hill fort."

"Have you ever seen it?" Will does not really know how to respond, but he wants to hear more.

"No, I never had the opportunity. It is a site of pilgrimage, rich in Catholic tradition, but I left the country and any practice of the faith behind when I was still very young," he responds, dipping the brush in more soap.

"I see."

"Were your parents religious?" Hannibal changes the subject, and the question throws Will off completely.

"Uh, yeah, why?" He pauses his scrubbing, turning to look at Hannibal, a quizzical expression on his face.

"Your mother's name is Julia, you are a William, and this is a Christian graveyard. It seemed the logical conclusion." He pours a cup of water over the foaming soap, washing it away to reveal the white stone, stark in contrast to the rest of the gravestone.

"No, I mean, why do you care?" Will asks, still slightly confused by the direction the conversation is taking.

"I am merely curious." Hannibal says, tone even. "You do not typically converse about your childhood." A pang of guilt resonates within Will's stomach. He is right, Will never talks about his past. It is not that he does not trust Hannibal, not at all, but there is something preventing him from sharing more than he already has.

"I'm sorry," he whispers.

"Whatever for?" Hannibal inquires, genuine surprise in his voice.

"For never telling you about my childhood. I'm just not used to talking about it. I don't like the pity."

"I do not pity you, Will, far from it."

"I know this is stupid, but I can't help but feeling like what I went through is insignificant compared to what you endured. I have trouble falling back asleep again after dreaming about

my childhood sometimes. I don't know how you can live with it, I really don't."

"Trauma is not a competition, Will. You are entitled to be overwhelmed by your experiences, just as I am. The principle of–" He is cut off by Will jerking his arm harshly, inclining his head in the direction of his mother's grave.

There stands a man, holding a bouquet of white chrysanthemums. He is shorter than Will, and more stout. Will has a certain gangliness to him that is balanced by his broader shoulders, but this man is much more compact. His hair is pin straight, a coat of grey across his head. He has a sour disposition, one that a person is born with rather than the kind that comes with age, his features twisted and scrunched, as if he is chewing something unpleasant.

"It's him."

Spin Your Thoughts to Tapestries

Chapter Notes

TW: general homophobia, mentions of rape and abuse, etc. Basically I hate Will's father, and I think he's an asshole, so here is my portrayal of that.

I'm trying to get back into my groove, and it just isn't working as well as I would have hoped. I was reading my first few chapters and I feel so bad because I feel like they're so much better. I need to get this done though, so hopefully it will be finished within the next few days. I think I might save some part of the plot for a potential sequel since it is not necessary to this story, and I don't want to be writing because I feel obligated to finish something.

Thanks for reading everyone!

The sun has mostly risen by now, and the birds have begun to sing. It adds a haunting eeriness to the run-down cemetery, somehow even more so than when it was dark. Will's gaze darts between Hannibal and the old man, searching for a reaction in the former and any evidence of unease in the latter, but he comes up empty handed. His father replaces the wilted bouquet with the fresh one in his arms, gingerly brushing the dried petals away. He stands completely still, head inclined toward the sky, and although Will cannot see his face, he is certain his eyes are closed.

"Not here," he whispers. "Go get the car, I'll follow him." Hannibal nods wordlessly, taking most of the supplies and leaving him with only the brush and bucket of water. Will tears his eyes from his father, glancing back to find Hannibal completely gone. He grins. The man's talent to miraculously appear and disappear whenever he wants is something he will always be jealous of. He turns his focus back to his father, ensuring that he does not stare. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a flicker of movement, and the man begins to walk in the direction he previously came from. Will quietly dumps the bucket of water on the ground, taking it and the brush in his hand. He casually trails his father, allowing a healthy distance between them, but making sure that he will not vanish around a corner before Will can act on it.

He takes out his phone to text Hannibal which direction they are heading in, taking care to keep an eye on the man in front of him. They make their way out of the cemetery and onto a street. It is relatively busy given the time of day, but he attributes it to the Church they had passed a block back. His father crosses the street, and Will stays on his current side, eyes curiously searching for something to hint at which car is his father's.

He watches as the man turns a corner into a small side street, the lights of a beat-down pickup flashing, so he quickly sends his location to Hannibal and waits on the sidewalk, pretending to be in the middle of an argument with his imaginary wife. There is a brick wall guarding the

Cemetery from the street, thick vines of ivy covering the face of it from top to bottom, which Will leans against. This he has learned from Hannibal: if no one is actively looking for him, worrying about anyone recognizing his face will be much more likely to lead to discovery than acting like any normal person. Hiding in plain sight, so to say. He spots the gunmetal grey of the Acura just as the pickup roars to life. Not daring to check which way the pickup turns, he briskly walks over to where Hannibal has stopped, hoping that Hannibal would have the sense to watch out for movement.

"He's in a brown Toyota pickup. Not sure of the model, but it's old," he grits out, hastily strapping on his seat belt.

"I saw it," comes the reply. "Let us be on our way." They follow the truck at a leisurely pace. Hannibal clearly has experience stalking his victims, so Will decides not to bother him with his anxieties.

"I still don't know what I want to say to him," he voices aloud. "It's strange to think about. In the past I hated him so much. I would often cry myself to sleep, my only comfort being the image of him dying at my hands, but now I feel indifferent. It's as if I have divorced myself from the idea of him. This is my final goodbye."

"You are moving past your grief, acknowledging the trauma you went through but refusing to allow it to rule over you. It is a healthy progression. I remember not so long ago when you refused to even talk about it, and now here you are."

"Is that pride I detect, doctor?" Will needles him and Hannibal exhales through an open smile, shaking his head.

"I am proud of you, Will," he retorts. "Is that so difficult to believe?"

"Not in present day, no." Will turns his attention back to the outside world, making sure he can still see the truck in the distance. The pickup turns into a dirt road, which Hannibal passes. Will turns to him, eyebrows raised in question.

"It would have been unwise to risk revealing that we were following him. The road could be a driveway for a singular house, and our presence would alert him. I doubt he expects us in particular, but it would be in our best interest to catch him unawares," he explains, and Will nods, mollified. They park a ways down, far enough to not be easily noticed, but close enough to have a good glimpse of anyone leaving the road, and wait. The anticipation is gnawing at him, and it is not exactly a nervous feeling, but he feels restless.

"Calm yourself," Hannibal soothes, gently running his thumb over the inside of Will's wrist. He immediately feels the tension he did not even realize he was holding leave his body as his shoulders lower and his expression relaxes.

"Hannibal." It is all he needs to say. The other man understands.

"Let us go now." Hannibal squeezes his hand before turning the engine back on. They slowly backtrack to the dirt road, and Will grins.

"You were right. Look at the mailbox." He says, pointing to the mailbox encrusted in overgrown shrubbery.

"Indeed. I often find the consequences of being overcautious much more agreeable than those of inadequate caution." He slows down, rounding the bend in the road to find a singular house at the end of it. The brown truck is parked directly in front of the house, barely obscuring the peeling pain and sagging window frames. They decide to park where they are to avoid Will's father being alerted by the sound of the car. Will cannot help but notice the fleeting glance he sees Hannibal throw at the trunk of the car, but they are on their way now. The air clings onto the chill from the night, despite the sun's rays. Fall is beginning to encroach upon them, and it will be just nigh a year from when he first stepped foot in Italy.

The knife in his pocket is a comfort, even if he doubts that he will need it. His father may be strong, but he is completely inexperienced in any kind of combat, which would be disastrous in a fight between both of them. No, he will not be likely to use it, yet it is a comfort nonetheless.

"Do you want me to wait for you? His reaction to seeing me may be counterproductive," inquires Hannibal, head angled in the direction of the front steps. Will had not even considered this as the idea of knocking on the door without Hannibal at his side was never a factor in his considerations, although now that he thinks about it, he realizes that it is the only option. If he is to accomplish what he wants, he must set it into motion himself. Suddenly he is grateful that Hannibal understands him better than he understands himself, and that he gave him a logical reason to ask for what he needs without feeling guilty about it.

"I love you," he breathes, inclining his head to brush his lips against Hannibal's. Hannibal kisses him back tenderly, sighing into his mouth when Will wraps his arms around him. The wind picks up momentarily, blowing their hair into their faces. Will laughs, breaking the contact to smooth the loose strands back behind Hannibal's ear. The older man's eyes glimmer in the light at the action.

"And I love you, but you have yet to answer my question," he chides, ruffling Will's hair playfully.

"I think you already know the answer, or otherwise you would not have asked it." He musses Hannibal's hair in retaliation, earning a withering glare that would likely have terrified him years ago but now cannot help but find endearing. "Wait for me, please," he says, planting a hasty kiss on Hannibal's cheek.

"Always."

The door to the house stands out against the bland siding, almost like a fly in a bowl of oatmeal. The windows are filthy, covered in months worth of dust and grime. The pollen from spring is still visible in the corners of the shutters. Will walks up the front porch steps,

noting the unsteady squeak of the wooden planks, just on the verge of falling apart. The property itself is devoid of anything except a few trees, but he feels constricted by it none the same, feeling as if the walls are leering down at him, forever the misfit. He continues to the front door, noting the pile of newspapers collecting dust by the door. It is a surprise they have not blown away in the wind. The cracks of paint stem from the door frame, continuing to radiate out to the sides in snake-like patterns. Some of the paint has flaked off all together, the bare plaster below it completely exposed to the summer sun. Will plants his feet firmly on the spot on the floor where there should be a doormat and knocks four times, the silence that follows ringing in the air equally as loudly. For a moment he thinks that no one will answer, but then the door opens. The man who resembles an older version of what he remembers of his father opens it, already shaking his head in annoyance before the door is open all the way.

"Who are ya and what do ya want?" he drawls, clumsily smoothing his hair back.

"It's Will." The man's brow knits itself together in shock, and the hand in his hair slaps his forehead as his mouth gapes open.

"Gosh, William? I barely recognized ya! You've filled out since the last time we talked." Will winces at the sound of his full first name. His accent is somehow thicker than he remembers, the vowels more elongated than before.

"I've been eating properly," he sneers, contempt clear in his tone.

"Well what ya want, boy? If you're looking for a place to stay, I ain't taking ya," the man bites back, crossing his arms. This is going about as well as he expected, but then his father deviates from his anticipated course. "Did that serial killer finally ditch you? He realize you're nothing but a worthless leech?" The remark hits Will, mostly because of how unexpected it is, but years of practice prevent him from showing it. Instead of answering the question that his father clearly does not actually care about, he poses his own.

"Aren't you going to invite us in?" His choice of wording is deliberate, and he waits for them to register on his father's face.

"Us?" The man asks, and Will laughs at his incredulity.

"You know it's rude to keep your guests waiting outside, and before his father can protest, he steps over the threshold of the house, lightly brushing his shoulder.

"A pleasure to finally meet you, Mr. Graham," comes the sound of Hannibal's voice behind him. By the deadpan tone, it is obviously not a pleasure. "After you," he says, and Will turns around to see his father pale as a sheet, looking like a stranger in his own home. Hannibal eyes the empty bottles that litter every corner of the floor, mouth curling in disgust. "Is this a recent development?" he asks, pointing the question at Will.

"No, not really. Unless you consider the last forty years to be 'recent.'" He kicks at one of the bottles, knocking it over. He can feel the bile rising in his throat and tries to steady himself. Obviously uncomfortable with the both of them completely ignoring him, Mr. Graham pipes up, but the effect has the opposite effect.

"So, Will. Ya really are the perfect disappointment. A murderer and a fag." He grins, somehow believing that he has managed to shake either of them. To his utter disappointment, Hannibal actually laughs, and the man gawks at him.

"Oh Will, this is proving to be immensely more fun than I initially thought," Hannibal wheezes. "Now I get to see where you got your habit of being rude in the face of stress from."

"Okay, that's enough." Will rolls his eyes. "Just because you're a psychiatrist does not mean you have to psychoanalyze me at every opportunity. In case you forgot, you won't–"

"Like you when you are psychoanalyzed?" he interrupts, baring his teeth at Will in a wide smile. "I know, and I apologize, my love, but if you believe that I will not like you then you are harshly mistaken." Will rolls his eyes dramatically a second time, turning his head back to find his father blinking between both of them with his mouth agape, the perfect impersonation of a fish out of water.

"Ya know y'all going to Hell right?" He spits, scrunching his face at the thought.

"And you think that you're not?" Will retorts, crossing his arms. Hannibal remains standing by the door, leaving his father caught between them. "Come on, don't give me that face. Have you really forgotten everything about your past?" He knocks over a few more of the empty bottles with the heel of his boot. "I suppose these don't help." His father doubles down, unfazed by the not-so-subtle jabs.

"It's a sin!" he shrieks. "Two men. . ." the words trail off, his face turning purple with strain and his voice gurgling at the prospect.

"Having sex?" Hannibal supplies, encouraging the man as if he is talking to a child.

"Why is everyone so concerned with that?" Will practically shouts, exasperated. At Hannibal's look of confusion, he realizes that the entire conversation with Mattia was a hallucination, meaning he is actually the one so concerned with this. "You know what, never mind," he mutters. Hannibal is clearly unconvinced, as evidenced by the way his gaze lingers a moment longer than usual, but he drops the subject.

"On the topic of Hell," continues Hannibal, facing Mr. Graham as if nothing happened, and he is about to discuss the last day's weather over a cup of tea. "You disregarded Will's question about whether you believe that to be the fate that awaits you. Do you truly expect your end to be different from his? From mine?"

"I should have sent you to that damn Christian boarding school. Maybe they'd have been more successful in beating this out of you." Of all the things he could have said, this is what seals his fate. The change in Hannibal's stance is barely visible, but to Will it is night and day. He watches as the flippant, jaunty manner disappears and is replaced with a cold rage he has only seen once before.

"So that they would have condemned him for existing during the day and then raped him at night?" he snarls, fire burning in his eyes. For the first time today, Will's father manages to look frightened. He shrinks into himself, shoulders sagging and knees drawing together.

"Hannibal," Will whispers, and when Hannibal turns to look at him, the fire leaves his eyes and his expression softens. "I just realized that I have never actually seen you kill anyone. To be fair, I often felt it after witnessing the crime scenes, but never in person." Hannibal raises his eyebrows, urging him to continue. "Are they really first aid supplies?" he asks, and Hannibal smiles.

"They can be used for first aid, yes."

"Fine. Let me rephrase," sighs Will. "Can you use them for anything other than first aid?"

"Will, I know twenty different ways to kill a man with my bare hands, the status of the objects I brought with us is hardly the issue here," Hannibal smirks, clearly enjoying this.

"Whatever, just go get them," he snaps.

"On the contrary, I think you should get them. I am in the middle of holding a pleasant conversation with your dear father, and it would be rude to leave it unfinished." He tilts his head up, eyes blazing at Mr. Graham, who begins to violently shake his head.

"Fine," Will grits out. "But you better both be in one piece by the time I get back." For a second he thinks that Hannibal is going to push him with another snarky reply, but the man is well-tuned to his limits, and he knows when enough is enough. He walks past his father, brushing against Hannibal's shoulder as he leaves, then changes his mind and comes back to plant a parting kiss on Hannibal's cheek, chuckling at the noise of disgust he hears from behind him.

"It bothers you, the fact that he and I love each other, perhaps even more so than the other aspects of our identities," Hannibal starts, eyes boring into Mr. Graham. "Please, have a seat. I would loathe to keep you standing." The older man complies, nervously swiping at his hair as he sinks into one of the chairs that litters the ground. Hannibal maneuvers a chair and sets it in front of him, mimicking the arrangement of his office. "Mr. Graham, I have been working tirelessly to undo all of the years of abuse you have burdened Will with, and here you are, trying ever so persistently to twist your wretched talons even further. I would advise that it is in your best interest to stop. Although I have promised not to do anything to you, that does not apply to Will. He is equally if not more capable than I am."

"He's a demon, just like you." The acid is clear in his voice, still attempting to grasp onto any advantage he can get.

"It's fascinating, really. You are the first person I have met to admit that Will had darkness in him before I became involved. The majority of the public would say that I influenced him to become what he is, but in truth I simply set him free," Hannibal reflects. "Tell me, when did you first know?"

"He killed my Julia," whispers Mr. Graham, voice quiet for the first time. Hannibal raises his eyebrows and remains silent, waiting for him to elaborate. "She died in childbirth. Doctors said it was some complication, but I know it was him," he sneers. Hannibal tries his best not to roll his eyes. It is obviously not how childbirth works, but the man obviously will not be reasoned with.

"When did you first hit him?" The question is direct, meant to catch him unawares. "Do not bother to lie to me, Mr. Graham. I am well aware of who, what, where, and how, I am simply missing the when aside from a general range."

"I think he was four," the man considers. "I remember him crying about something dumb, and I was just so tired of it, so I hit him. I wanted to wipe that sorry little expression off of his ugly little face."

"You hit a four-year old with a belt buckle because he was crying?" Hannibal asks, tone completely neutral.

"Nah, the belt was later. First time it was just my hands." He seems satisfied at the thought, slowly closing his hands into fists. It takes Hannibal all of his self restraint not to slit the man's throat. This is Will's retribution, not his.

"Why did you choose to withhold food as a punishment?" He asks instead. Mr. Graham scratches his head, considering the question.

"Dunno. Just thought he didn't deserve it I guess. I mean, look at him." The answer seems to not even bother the man, and Hannibal has heard enough.

"I think that will be all, Mr. Graham," he concludes with finality, deciding to watch the man until Will comes back.

Not even a minute later Will arrives at the door, both duffel bags swung over each shoulder.

"Is this therapy, Dr. Lecter?" he asks, a ragging tone evident in his voice. "I'm not sure if I should be jealous or not."

"No clocks this time," Hannibal reassures. "What have you brought for yourself?" He looks at the bags with evident curiosity.

"I feel as if I have been preventing you from being yourself over the last year," Will begins, and Hannibal frowns. "I never said it outright, but you have to have picked up on it. They didn't call you in to deal with me for nothing. I feel as if I've been pushing a ball of snow up a hill. The harder I push, the larger it becomes and the more likely I am to be caught under its weight. It would be wiser to simply let it go." He glides over to Hannibal, peering up into his eyes. "I'm not going to stop you anymore, I can't, and I shouldn't. I went into this knowing exactly who you are, and I'll be damned if you have to change that for me."

"Will," Hannibal whispers, his warm breath tickling Will's bottom lip. They are standing so close together. He could easily lean forward to close the gap and press their lips together, but he stops himself. Now is not the time.

"I want you to do it, Hannibal. I want to watch you do what you want to him."

"Will. . ." he trails off. "You do not realize what you are giving to me."

"If you can't accept that I fully understand the exact weight that this holds and that I want to give it to you anyway, then take it this way. I don't want him to be the first person I kill since

Abigail. It would make him special somehow, and he does not deserve that." His last words are so quiet that there is no possibility of his father having heard them. He can feel Hannibal change his mind, the exact shift completely unnoticeable, but they are forever intertwined.

"As you wish," Hannibal says, smiling softly. "What do you want me to do to him?"

All the Blood That Is Red

Chapter Notes

TW: for more homophobia, detailed descriptions of medical procedures, mentions of sexual assault.

I did so much research for this one, I really hope you all enjoy! I finally got past my writer's block, and I absolutely love this chapter, so I would greatly appreciate any comments! No pressure of course, I appreciate everyone who even just reads my work :)

Also, unrelated to this fic, but my condolences to everyone that has been personally victimized by the ending of The Secrets of Dumbledore. I cried, and now I am permanently traumatized.

Anyway, thank you so much to everyone who has stuck with this, the end is in sight!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will's father stares at them both in abject horror, his knees bouncing up as he trembles, his shoes clicking on the faux wooden floor. Before Will can properly consider, he shoots up with a speed unnatural for a man of his age and leaps toward the door. Hannibal expertly catches him by the wrist and uses the leverage to swing him into his chest. He holds his arms back with one hand, using the other to hold him across the chest.

"Oh, Mr. Graham, we are not finished with you yet," Hannibal scolds, turning his attention back to Will.

"I want you to do what you think is appropriate, Doctor," he declares coyly. "I doubt you don't have any ideas."

"As a matter of fact I know exactly what I am going to do with you," Hannibal whispers, and the man in his grip begins to squirm, perspiration evident on his forehead. "Do you have a large counter space? Or a dining table perhaps?" The old man refuses to answer, instead tilting his head forward in an attempt at biting Hannibal's forearm, but Hannibal is faster than him again, swatting at his ear. Will watches enraptured as his father collapses under the obvious ringing in his ears. "Are you going to cooperate now?" Hannibal asks, and the man sags even more in answer.

"There's probably something in the kitchen," Will supplies, wishing to get going with this. He swings the straps of both bags across his shoulders and saunters through the living room and past the doorway that leads into the kitchen. Hannibal slings the man over his shoulder, quickly following behind.

The kitchen is a complete mess. Half-opened cans litter the counter tops, ants crawl across the floor, and used pots sit in a pile in the sink. Hannibal curls his lip in disgust at the sheer grime of it, and even Will seems taken aback. He sets the bags down in a corner and looks to Hannibal for direction.

"This room will not be suitable for our needs," he explains, stating the obvious. "I hope your bed is in a better state than this because we are running out of options." Hannibal lowers the man to his feet. "Are you able to walk now?"

"Yes," he mutters under his breath. Hannibal gestures for him to lead the way, and the three of them make their way up the rickety steps to the second floor. The paint here is also peeling, making the house look like some wild animal scratched its way along the walls. Mr. Graham stops halfway down the corridor and enters a small room with an overhead lamp. It is empty except for a single twin bed in the middle of the floor, which Hannibal inspects with some scrutiny and then nods his approval.

"This will do," he says. "I trust you have not eaten breakfast?"

"No, I haven't." Will's father has dropped the swagger and brash demeanor, seemingly resigned to his fate. Hannibal begins stripping the bed of its sheets, carelessly throwing them on the floor in a corner of the room.

"Good, otherwise we would have had to wait, and that would have been unpleasant for all parties involved." Will closes the door behind them, adding another layer of security despite the feeling that his father is finished with attempted escapes.

"Do you need help with anything, Hannibal?" he asks, feeling awkward simply standing there.

"If you wouldn't mind," Hannibal responds as he sorts through one of the bags and hands Will a plastic sheet. "Could you please spread this on the bed? Wash your hands first, I do not want him to die of sepsis." Will takes the sheet, furrowing his brows as he stuffs it under his arm.

"You aren't killing him?" he asks, surprise evident on his face. Hannibal is so lost in his preparations that he barely registers the question.

"Hmm? Oh, yes. No, I decided I have a much better idea in mind for him. Are you familiar with short bowel syndrome, Will?" He takes out a packet of disinfecting wipes and begins cleaning the nearby nightstand.

"I don't think so," Will answers, curiosity piquing.

"I doubted you would have. It is not particularly exciting, although I feel that it will suit our needs quite effectively." He goes on to arrange another plastic sheet over the table and places two trays filled with tools on top of it. "A person with short bowel syndrome is missing a significant portion of their small intestine, which prevents them from absorbing enough nutrients into the bloodstream, resulting in malnutrition and various other rather unpleasant symptoms. Most commonly children are either born with it, or it occurs as a side effect after a

resective surgery. In our case it will be the latter." Hannibal does not see Will's father begin to tremble, but he acknowledges the man regardless.

"In case you are curious about treatment, Mr. Graham, short bowel syndrome can be managed with a proper diet and in serious cases parenteral or enteral nutrition." At Mr. Graham's silence he adds. "You will likely have a feeding tube for the rest of your life."

"Hannibal?" Will asks, voice low in the resounding silence. When Hannibal turns to him, he continues. "How did you know?"

"That your father did more than hit you? I asked and he admitted it." A flicker of understanding passes over Will's eyes as he sees why Hannibal wanted him to go to the car.

"But you knew before then?" he pries, stepping closer to the man.

"Yes." Hannibal stops fidgeting with the medical supplies. "I see it in you every day, Will. The way you always eat everything on your plate, always double check to make sure the pantry is well-stocked. Even then when we first met, you ate the breakfast I brought for you as if it was your first warm meal of the week. Even your fishing is evidence of your need to control your diet. You are a hunter, and nothing can stop you from eating if you provide for yourself." His eyes are sad, pained even, but Will senses no pity. He still bows his head in embarrassment. To realize that Hannibal knew this part of his past all along makes him feel exposed, bare to the world. "I see it in you because I recognize the same proclivities in myself." At this, Will lifts his head and meets Hannibal's gaze, his eyes softening.

"Enough with the 'I know how you feel,'" sneers Will's father. "I mean come ON, you're practically an aristocrat," the old man guffaws. Before he can utter another word, Will is pressing a knife into his throat.

"Be careful what you say," he warns. "You don't know him and you don't know me, not anymore, but I will let you in on something." He leans in, letting the man feel his hot breath on his face. "Hannibal is the one that always keeps his promises, not me." He presses the knife in ever so slightly, just enough to draw blood, and then pushes away, leaving Mr. Graham to choke on his saliva.

He turns to find Hannibal gazing at him with the same intensity as after they kiss, his pupils blown and glinting in the light. His eyes always find a way to reflect whatever light is available, often glimmering even in the dark.

"You need not defend my honor, Will," he says, contradicting his obvious rapture. "I do not care what he thinks of me."

"I do," Will defends. "Either way he was getting on my nerves anyway. Are you almost done?" Hannibal looks like he is about to affirm, but then he changes his mind, a slight rearrangement in the quirk of his mouth.

"Would you like to assist me? In the surgery that is," he clarifies, awaiting Will's response.

"I. . . uh. . . I don't know how," Will admits. "I've only ever been present for my own surgeries, and I was knocked out for those."

"No matter. Time is not of the essence here. I would like it if you would assist, given that you are willing?" Hannibal walks over to him, gently running his slender fingers over the underside of his jaw, and Will leans into the touch.

"I would like nothing more." He grins, elated at how uncomfortable his father looks. "Oh give it up, you're acting like we're actively murdering someone in front of you. You're being an even bigger drama queen than Hannibal, which I didn't even think was possible."

"Me? Drama queen? How can you say such a thing?" Hannibal ripostes, feigning a martyred expression.

"Oh do shut up," Will laughs, pecking him on the lips.

"Alright, Mr. Graham." Hannibal straightens, turning to address the man still gawking at them. "I am going to sedate you. This is to everyone's benefit, including yours, as you do not have to suffer through surgery while awake, I do not have to bother tying you down, and Will and I can have a civilized conversation in your absence." He extends a hand to gesture at the bed now covered in plastic sheets and other medical drapes. "Come lay down. I am going to put you to sleep. You will not need a ventilator as I am using Propofol, so do not worry about that." Mr. Graham looks like being intubated is the last of his worries, but he complies regardless. He sits down and swings his legs onto the bed, lying flat on his back. Hannibal smiles in satisfaction, snaps on a pair of gloves, and reaches for a small syringe he had prepared.

"Lidocaine," he explains. "Propofol is rather painful when injected intravenously, so a local anesthetic is often used to numb the area prior." He sticks the needle into Mr. Graham's arm, lowering the plunger a third of the way, and removing the needle. Repeating the process two more times, he gently massages the area, manually spreading the medication. "Give that a moment," he says, a wistful expression fleeting across his face. He waits for a few more minutes and then injects the Propofol. Will's father's eyelids begin to droop as he starts drifting away into the realm of unconsciousness. Hannibal takes his other arm and raises it above his face. He releases his grip, watching as the arm hits Mr. Graham square on the face as it falls. Smiling in satisfaction, he turns to Will.

"You should scrub first. It is always wise to keep an eye on a sedated patient. Propofol can have adverse effects if not monitored, and we are already suffering from the lack of an anesthesiologist," Hannibal explains. He rummages in one of the bags and hands a bottle of disinfectant to Will. "Wash your hands for five minutes, and make sure to clean under your fingernails and in any crevices as well as halfway up to your elbows. When you finish, make sure to angle your hands upward so that the drips flow down your elbows. I was serious that I do not desire for him to die of sepsis. It would be counterproductive to the lesson I want him to learn." Will nods, compartmentalizing the information.

When he returns, Hannibal helps him into a surgical gown, cap, mask, and gloves, allowing his touch to linger barely longer than would be appropriate under normal circumstances, but nothing about this is normal.

"I feel ridiculous," Will says, looking down at himself. "Is this really what surgeons wear?"

"Usually we also wear scrubs underneath, but I did not find those necessary in this case." Hannibal walks to the doorway, preparing to go wash his own hands, but then he halts. "Please monitor his breathing. His vitals have been consistent while you were gone, and I doubt they will change, but it is best to be prepared. All you need to do is ensure that his breath remains consistent, and he should be alright." Will nods in affirmation, leaving Hannibal to go scrub his hands.

Hannibal returns after a length of time, donning the same garments as Will. He walks over to the right side of the bed, beckoning Will to the opposite side.

"I plan to perform a resection of the jejunum, the middle part of the small bowel," he explains, spreading an orange substance over the man's exposed abdomen. "Jejunal resections are less complicated than anything to do with the duodenum due to the smaller presence of blood vessels and bile ducts. This serves our purpose anyway because the jejunum is the site of the highest nutrient absorption." Will watches in awe as Hannibal picks up a scalpel, pressing the tip of it below the man's sternum. He draws blood, red pooling beneath the blade as he deepens the cut. The blood blooms across his skin, staining it with its color. The entire cut is about six inches in length. "Abdominal surgeries often take a long time to heal because of the muscles that are cut. The procedure itself is called a laparotomy, where the abdominis rectus is separated along the linea alba. Could you pass me a retractor please?" He extends his hand, and Will places a hook-like device in it. Hannibal catches both the muscle and skin on the edge of it, pulling the opening open even wider. "Thank you. Note the mesentery," he says, pointing to a fibrous membrane covering most of the organs in the abdominal cavity. "It attaches the intestines to the abdominal wall and holds them in place." Will watches as he moves the membrane aside, revealing the small intestines.

"I can see why you're so enthralled by the human body," Will breathes. "It's beautiful." Hannibal's eyes gleam upon hearing his words, and the wistful expression from the car returns momentarily. Will scrutinizes the expression, trying to decode it, but as usual, he is unable to read Hannibal like he can everyone else. It is as if Hannibal's emotions speak a language he does not yet understand fully. "What did they do to you? At the orphanage, I mean." Hannibal's eyes flash at the change of subject, and he can see the invisible walls begin to knit themselves together. He pushes forward anyway. Hannibal's defenses are not impenetrable, they merely require someone clever enough to navigate them. "Did someone. . ." he trails off, recalling Hannibal's seemingly random outburst at the mention of boarding school. Hannibal's eyes darken, as if daring him to finish the sentence.

"If you are inquiring if I was assaulted, the short answer is no," he says, voice deadpan as he continues to work.

"And the long answer?" Will prods, deciding to drop caution to the wind.

"There was a man, a high-ranking priest. He was a pillar of cruelty, but no one could move against him because he was in a position of power," he pauses, concentrating on his task for a moment. "I told you I stopped speaking Lithuanian when I left the country, which is only partly true. The entirety of it is that I stopped speaking altogether. I was mute for years." Will thinks about the unimaginable pain that must have driven a young boy to forsake

communication, and holds back the tears gathering in his eyes. Hannibal sighs, the barely noticeable wavering of his voice the only evidence of the effect of his memories. "The man enjoyed preying on those that were vulnerable. He saw me as weak, unable to protest. He told me that he would stop if I told him to, that otherwise he would be unable to resist," he spits the words out, obvious disgust in his tone. Will trembles slightly, wanting to strangle the man and watch as the light leaves his eyes. "He was not the only one unable to resist that day. I killed him. He was the first person I killed after my escape."

"I'm sorry," Will says, unsure what else there is to say.

"Do not be. The world is for the better without him." Hannibal retorts, holding his hand out for a clamp. Will gives it to him.

"You know that isn't what I meant."

"Isn't it?" He bites back, but then his demeanor softens, the ice in his eyes melting away. "My apologies, Will. I did not mean to displace my negative emotions onto you."

"It's not like I didn't provoke you," Will acquiesces, smiling behind the surgical mask. He cannot see Hannibal's face, but the corners of his eyes tilt up in the way they do when he smiles, which is enough for Will to know that he is forgiven his trespasses.

Hannibal continues to inspect Will's father's intestines, pointing out various details to Will as he goes along. Although Will has no experience in surgery, he learns the ropes decently well for a first-timer. Hannibal grins when he picks up a clamp to give to the older man before he even asks for it. The surgery is meant to take about two to three hours sans any complications, and they are approaching the end of the second hour. Hannibal finishes reconnecting the two pieces of small intestine and begins to detach the clamps holding it in place. Will watches, taking the instruments from his hands whenever he has need for it.

"Hannibal," he says, the name a prayer between his lips. He never has been one for religion, but he has found it in the man before him. He believes in Hannibal, worships him even. The man looks up at him, hands completely still within Mr. Graham's abdomen. "Have I ever told you how beautiful you are?" Hannibal drops the retractor in his hand, and Will watches him scramble to pick it up and discard it.

"You have not," he murmurs, an almost sheepish quality in his voice. Will balks at the idea of Hannibal being bashful about anything, much less a straightforward compliment.

"Well I should have told you sooner. I think it every time I lay eyes on you," he admits, noticing the shiver spreading through the man. "You look so natural, so in your element. It's mesmerizing to watch." Hannibal gazes back at him from under his eyelashes, sincerity written on his face.

"It is because I am with you, Will," he finally responds.

"Maybe, but it is also an intrinsic quality of yours, regardless of where I fall into the picture. I am sure you looked the same way when you killed people as the ripper," Will ventures, noting the risk in bringing up yet another object from their past.

"Is that what you want, to watch me actually kill someone?" Hannibal asks, betraying nothing in his tone. Will sighs, finally knowing what it is he needs to say.

"It's been enough of what I want, at least for now. We are here because it is what I wanted. Hell, you are elbow deep in my father's blood because I asked it of you. I know it does not exactly bother you, but still. You did it for me, to please me." His tone is insistent, teetering on the edge of pleading. "I want to know what you want, Hannibal." His voice drops, a gravely timber to it. "Please be honest with me, I truly want to know. The worst I can do is refuse." Hannibal shakes his head at the last part.

"No," he says. "The worst you can do is leave, and then I will be left wishing I had never spoken."

"I'm not leaving you, Hannibal. Please, I hope you see that." He peers squarely into Hannibal's eyes, holding his piercing gaze. "We are alone without each other, we cannot survive separation. You are me, and I am you. We are conjoined, and everything is starting to blur."

"Where does the difference between the past and the future come from?" Hannibal asks, voice distant.

"Mine? Before you and after you. You have imprinted yourself on me, as I have on you. There is no escape for either of us, and I would not have it any other way." At this point, Hannibal seems to remember that there is a man open on the table beneath him. He reaches for the sutures, preparing to close the wound.

"I want to go to Lithuania with you," he murmurs, driving the needle through the layers of skin and watching it emerge on the other side of the incision. "I want you to see my home, where I grew up. I want to give my sister a proper funeral." His voice is so low that Will has to strain to hear it. "I cannot safely go there. The last time I tried I could not, it was too physically painful. I have not been back since then, but I would like to take you, Will."

"And I will go with you. Always, Hannibal. I will always go with you. I will follow you to the ends of the Earth." Will looks up to find tears in Hannibal's eyes. He wants to reach up and touch him in some way, but now is not the time or place. Something flickers across Hannibal's eyes, and it is so quick that he fears he has imagined it entirely. "What is it? I can't help but feel like you still have something to say." Hannibal actually manages to look nervous, which in turn makes Will nervous. What could the man have to say that is putting him on edge so much? Hannibal's features smooth out, indicating that he has made up his mind.

"Will." He says his name the way he always says it, as if the name is the only water left on Earth that can quench him, as if it is the very drumming of his beating heart. "I want to marry you." Will's eyes widen in disbelief, and he sees Hannibal begin to retreat back into himself.

"Yes," he says, stopping the older man in his tracks. There is a pause between them. In reality it lasts barely more than two seconds, but to Will it is the entire length of his existence. "Yes," he repeats, as if testing out the syllable on his tongue for the first time. "Yes, Hannibal, I want to marry you, too." The tears that have been building behind Hannibal's eyes finally spill

over, collecting in the edge of his mask. "I would kiss you if I could, but that doesn't seem appropriate." Will gestures at the instruments surrounding them.

"In that case I will have to be cautious not to make a mistake in my haste," Hannibal jokes as he picks the forceps and tweezers back up. Will laughs at the sheer ridiculousness of it all.

"Does this mean I'm engaged?" He asks, marveling at the phrase.

"I should certainly hope so," quips Hannibal, shooting a glance at him from his work.

"I've never been engaged before." Will eyes his progress on the sutures.

"Neither have I," he responds, finishing the last knot.

"It will be a first for both of us then."

Chapter End Notes

Guys I promise that Hannibal let Mr. Graham slap himself because he was checking if he was actually knocked out, not because he wanted to unnecessarily torture him lol.

What Looks Black in the Moonlight

Chapter Notes

> This was supposed to be the last chapter, but I got a bit carried away, so I'm going to be writing the last part tomorrow. I have a lot more to say, so I decided to compromise and finish this story as it is with their arrival in Lithuania, but then work on a sequel a bit further down the line. I have exams in two weeks and I really need to start studying because as it is going right now, I have been writing in almost every second of my free time for the last two weeks. I cannot promise that the sequel is for sure happening, but I really want it to since I love these two idiots, and I'm no where near done with them.
>
> Anyway, thank you so much for reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They stay in the house for a few days, making sure that Mr. Graham will be alright on his own. Hannibal weans him off of the propofol and starts him on a small dose of fentanyl in his IV for the pain. He leaves two weeks' worth of oxycodone tablets as well as instructions on how to care for the wound and when to remove the stitches.

"Alcohol will only make your condition worse. You should consider quitting now that you have motivation to do so," Hannibal explains. Will avoids his father as much as possible, which is not difficult given that the man is mostly bedridden. Now that his goal has been accomplished, he feels a need to leave this place, his past, behind. There is nothing for him here now, and his future with Hannibal awaits him, calling to him like the gong of a church bell. Marriage. They are actually getting married. Of course, they will not be able to sign legal documents given their wanted status in the United States, and the fact that they cannot legally marry in Lithuania, but it does not matter to him. The bond that connects them is far stronger than anything written on a piece of paper.

While Hannibal tends to his father, Will begins to plan for their journey out of the United States. The false paperwork Hannibal somehow magically procured has been exceedingly helpful. He makes a mental note to ask the man how he manages to get his hands on such things so quickly, but he has a sneaking suspicion that the answer is quite simply money. When he first found out the scope of Hannibal's inheritance, he almost passed out, instead opting to ask why Hannibal bothered with becoming a doctor in the first place as he clearly did not need the money.

"I enjoyed the challenge of it," he had said. "The pursuit of knowledge, not to mention the practice I was able to get. It helped me become much more artistic and creative in my tableaus." Will nodded, having thought as much. While Hannibal was always talented at sitting still and occupying himself within the walls of his mind, he finds that if given the choice, the man will always be running about, doing, creating, influencing. Taking away

Hannibal's freedom would be like attempting to tame the sea, forcing all of that unyielding strength to bend to one's will. It is unthinkable to him now, and the memory of what could have been had that night gone differently haunts him to this day.

Touching Hannibal now, with all that they have given up for each other, is like touching the divine. He had described the chapel in his memory palace as severe and beautiful, but Will thinks that the description works for him as well. He had meant it when he told Hannibal that he often forgets that he is mortal. You have brought me to my knees, I am undone. The words echo in his head at every waking hour, seeking him in every corner of his mind. It is still so surreal, even now over two years since they initially ran away, to see Hannibal as the world sees him, the unfeeling, dispassionate psychopath that delights in manipulation and death, only for the mask to melt away at his touch. In his classes in psychology, his professors had always said that the best way to define a psychopath is to take away all of the traits that make a person human, leaving behind only the shell of a being that can act and pretend to have them but be ultimately incapable of achieving actual emotion. He supposes that he understands why people like Jack see Hannibal in this way, as they do not see him at all. Hannibal has always said that a person is made up of all of the echoes and memories that live within those that they have touched throughout their lives, leaving the true nature of the person to only be expressed as a culmination of all of these echoes. Will supposes that this is true, but both of them have worn so many false facades throughout their lives that the picture would become muddled, no way to determine what is true and what is not. Regardless, he is glad that no one has seen Hannibal as he has. It is a secret shared between only them, how Hannibal quivers at his touch, how the corners of his mouth turn up whenever he senses Will is near, how he seems to always find Will, even in sleep.

The touch of a hand on his shoulder startles him from his reverie, and it migrates upward to cup his cheek as he looks up at Hannibal. They did not bring a large assortment of clothes with them, so it feels somewhat strange to see Hannibal in the same outfit he was wearing yesterday. The top button of his umber-colored button-up is undone, making him look a little disheveled. Will likes to see him like this, more open and relaxed.

"We are able to leave now, mylimasis," he divulges, stroking along the high point of Will's cheekbone. "Your father will be alright on his own from now on, and I would rather not delay." Will leans into the touch, the warmth of Hannibal's hand seeping into his skin. He closes his eyes, savoring the silent moment between them. The feeling of soft lips on his forehead makes him sigh, and he opens his eyes, reaching out to take Hannibal's hand in his.

"What are we waiting for, then?"

Will bought them separate tickets, wanting to reduce the risk of someone noticing them as much as possible. Hannibal himself is recognizable enough on his own, and adding Will into the mix would no doubt hinder their efforts. Thankfully, his forged documents are British, so he will not have to worry about crossing European borders after his initial arrival. The plan is to fly to Germany directly and then take the train to Lithuania. Hannibal will go first since he

actually speaks German, and Will will follow him a few hours later so that they can board the train together.

The Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport is among the nicer airports he has visited throughout his life, which is not saying a lot considering his first time being out of the country was in his late thirties. He makes a comment about how the pillars remind him of Roman architecture, at which Hannibal looks like he is going to collapse.

"I truly must take you to see actual Roman architecture, Will, because this is in no shape or form the same as the actual thing," he lectures, but Will can hear the jest in his tone.

They go through security separately, and it takes all of his self-control not to look back in Hannibal's direction. By all accounts, it would only take someone recognizing him and alerting security for them to have no way out of this, but someone is much more likely to become suspicious if he acts suspicious, so he keeps his head forward. Soon enough it is his turn to go through the scanners, and as expected, nothing happens. He always enjoyed the impersonal nature of airport employees, just trying to get everyone through as quickly as possible. His ticket and passport are clenched tightly in his hand as he hurries over to the gate where they agreed to meet. A few minutes later, Hannibal materializes by his side, sinking into the chair beside him. He places his travel bag across his knees, and Will feels his hand gently searching for his. Hannibal is not one to have anxiety or nerves about anything, but Will can feel that the contact calms him, and he smiles.

"It's good to see you," he says, still gazing off into the crowd of people milling across the floor.

"You saw me less than twenty minutes ago," Hannibal chuckles, but he squeezes Will's hand anyway.

"Well it's always good to see you." Will turns to look at him, smiling broadly at the softness in Hannibal's eyes. They gaze at each other for a while, simply appreciating the intimacy of being able to stare without interruption. Hannibal is the first to break the contact, extracting his hand from Will's to begin unzipping the travel bag across his lap. At first, Will is half expecting him to somehow have smuggled a weapon past security, but then the man reveals a leather wallet. The edges are lightly worn, a lighter color than the chestnut body of the wallet. Hannibal passes it to him, and Will raises an eyebrow, peering at the thing as if it is going to bite him.

"It is only in case we are separated," Hannibal clarifies, voice even as if he is not implying the literal worst case scenario.

"Don't say it like that," Will stammers, turning the wallet over in his fingers. "Don't say it like it's a possibility."

"It is a possibility, Will." The older man turns to face him. "We need to prepare for every inevitability." Will shakes his head, but he does not say anything, knowing that Hannibal is right. He undoes the clasp holding the wallet in its folded shape, spreading it open to reveal what appears to be about one thousand dollars in cash as well as various Euro notes.

"If we do. . . get separated, that is," he gulps, shutting his eyes closed as if he could make the reality of it go away, "how will I find you?"

"We will always find a way back to each other," Hannibal supplies, clearly not having a concrete answer. "I found you again when they took you away to the states, did I not?"

"You did," Will acquiesces. "But Jack wanted you to find me." Hannibal stiffens at the mention of Jack, which Will cannot exactly blame him for.

"I would still have found you, one way or the other." He chuckles, looking down as if smiling at an inside joke. "I still cannot believe he thought it would be a good idea to lock you away at Johns Hopkins." Will joins him in smiling because it really is ludicrous.

"Jack's biggest failure was thinking that he had the upper hand. He always managed to underestimate you, believing that he had you all figured out," he ponders aloud.

"On the contrary, our dear Jack's most monumental failure was underestimating you. He believed that you were loyal to him in the end, that he would be able to spot betrayal, but it did not work because you did betray him, Will." Hannibal's voice is low and contemplative. He lifts his eyes up to the ceiling, as if searching for something that he knows is not there. "The reason he missed it was because you did not know you would betray him until you did it. Always the unstable element in the equation."

"If you compare me to the sun again, I'm going to make you wish you had a sunburn," Will smirks. Antagonizing the older man is one of his favorite pastimes now that he knows no blood will be born from their sparring.

"Oh, is that how it is?" Hannibal bites back, taking the bait. "And what is it that you would do?" Will falters for a split second, but it is enough. "Ah, I see you are making empty threats again. What is to be done about that?" His voice has taken on a smoky edge, and the heat goes straight to Will's cheeks, a pink tinge spreading across his face.

"Stop flirting with me and threatening me at the same time," he pouts. "It isn't going to work." Hannibal laughs at this and tucks a strand of Will's hair behind his ear.

"But my dear, it is working phenomenally. I would tell you to look at yourself in a mirror, but I am afraid that it might melt." His expression is exceedingly smug, and Will fights the urge to kiss him.

"You are exaggerating," he enunciates instead.

"I am not." Hannibal has the gall to look offended, and Will is contemplating the risk of tackling him to the floor when the gate announces boarding. "I must be on my way, mylimasis, but I will see you soon enough." Will doubts that it will actually be soon enough, but there is not anything he can do about it, so he nods. Hannibal takes his hand and sneakily kisses the inside of his wrist, massaging the same place with his fingers as he lowers it. His voice drops to a whisper. "I love you, Will."

"I love you, Hannibal." With that, Hannibal is off, and Will grabs his bag to head to his own gate. He booked their flights with two separate airlines. Thankfully, flights to Berlin from New Orleans are common enough that he will be only a few hours behind Hannibal instead of a day or two. The airport is relatively busy because of how early it still is, but it is probably always busy. In the past, he would close his eyes and sleep away the time in a situation like this, but now that he is a (relatively) wanted fugitive, that is out of the question. He refuses to check the news on principle because he does not want to see what the world has been saying about him, Hannibal, and especially the both of them. He wonders if Jack revealed to the general public that he left willingly with Hannibal, as well as what he did to accomplish their escape. On one hand, it is Jack's duty to report on it, but on the other, it is a painful reminder of Jack's missteps regarding him. It is possible the man did not want to tarnish his reputation even more, especially since he would have to explain why he had confronted them and not called for backup in the first place.

The wallet Hannibal gave him is still clasped in his hands, and he turns it over and over, examining every end of it as if some secret message or compartment will open, but nothing happens. All the waiting has made him hungry, so he opens the wallet to fiddle with the inside of it instead. He notices a small compartment closed by a zipper. Gingerly opening it, he finds a folded piece of paper. He takes it out slowly, afraid to rip it somehow, but it is thicker than usual printer paper. It reminds him of the sketchbook paper Hannibal always seems to have on hand. Unfolding the paper just as gingerly as before, he recognizes the handwriting immediately. The swooping, elegant penmanship is unmistakably Hannibal's, and the very sight of it warms him inside. Quickly glancing from side to side, he begins to read.

My beloved Will,
I trust you will find this letter sooner or later, and if not then I will tease you about growing soft in your old age. I suppose that would make me old as well by comparison, but come to think of it I do not mind. If growing old is inevitable, then I want it to be with you. I am certain you will delight in teasing me endlessly about this, to which I merely wish you the best of luck. Even writing this now, you are sleeping soundly beside me, and I already miss you. Watching you wake up is like witnessing the life come back to you. You appear so delicate in sleep, and I cannot help but think how utterly deceiving the image is. You are ferocious when you wish to be, an unstoppable force in the night. I am left to ponder what would occur if you were to encounter an immovable object, although I am certain it would be violent and glorious. Have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will? It appears quite black. As the saying goes, it is in fact thicker than water, and it oozes instead of flowing when freed from the intricate pump that is our circulatory system. If you have not, I hope to show you one day. I suspect you are likely still sitting at the gate, so I will take the time to inform you that I secretly packed a bag of sandwiches in your bag. I knew that the screening process would already alarm you, and I did not want to add to that anxiety. Food is perfectly permissible as long as it is solid, which is exactly the case with sandwiches. In the nigh-impossible event that you have grown bored of sandwiches, you may use the money in this wallet and purchase something from the food court, although I cannot imagine you agreeing to that. All I ask is that you please eat something. You will not just 'eat later' as you so often say. Your food on

the plane is already taken care of. Now please eat because laying on you when you are skin and bone is not very comfortable. Safe travels, Will. I will see you again very soon.

With love,
Hannibal Lecter

Will cannot believe that he is crying in an airport over a piece of paper, but he is. Quickly wiping his eyes to make sure that he does not splotch the ink, he stuffs the page into his pocket. Although they did technically spend the last week together, they had to take turns monitoring his father during the night to make sure that he did not run away or call the police. Aside from the stolen kisses and fleeting touches here and there, he has not a chance to properly be with Hannibal the way he yearns to. The letter is not even romantic. It is rude, if anything, especially by Hannibal's standards, but it is a piece of Hannibal that the man has given him to keep. He takes it out a second time, caring not to crumple it any further and reads it again. And again.

"Sir, are you alright?" Will looks up to find a scrawny man that looks like he is in his mid-20s standing over him. His tight curls are cut short and his jaw is sharp.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Will shoots back, pocketing the letter a second time.

"You sure don't look fine." Will does not know what this guy wants, and he is not exactly itching to find out. To his horror, the kid sits down next to him and extends a hand.

"Josh," he says, shaking Will's hand firmly. "And you are?" Will's usual strategy of being socially awkward and outright unlikable is clearly not going to work here, so he decides to get it over with as quickly as possible.

"I'm Peter," he lies. There would probably not be any harm in telling him his real name, but Will is not taking any chances this time around.

"Where are you going Peter?" he asks, obviously unperturbed by Will's sour demeanor.

"Germany."

"Oh come on man, I could have told you that! You're sitting at the Lufthansa terminal to Berlin. Of course you're going to Germany. I meant 'where' as in what are you doing going to Germany? What's in Berlin for you?" Josh is so enthusiastic that Will cannot help but soften.

"I'm going to see my fiance," he asserts, hoping that the information will sate the kid's curiosity.

"Oh you're getting married! Congratulations, man. Is she pretty?" Will stifles a laugh, suppressing the image of Hannibal's reaction to being called pretty. If he is being entirely honest, the man would probably take the compliment in stride, completely unfazed.

"Yes, very pretty," he says.

"That's great man, I'm happy for you," Josh pauses, a contemplative expression on his face. "There's this one I want to ask out, you know? I just don't know if they like me like that, see." Will looks off into the distance, a knowing smile on his lips.

"You'll never know if you don't ask him, right?" Josh bolts up, looking at him in bewilderment.

"How did you know? That I like a guy, I mean." His voice is quieter now, almost fearful. Will chuckles. It is not the kid's fault that he accidentally stumbled upon special investigator Will Graham.

"You know, if you paid more attention, you would have noticed I never called my fiance a woman," he chides gently. Josh's eyes widen in surprise.

"You mean your fiance is a guy?" he asks incredulously.

"Last I checked, yes," laughs Will, and Josh cracks a smile.

"Damn, that's great! How long have y'all been together?" The genuine curiosity and innocence on his face are almost too much for Will. If only he knew. He hopes he never finds out.

"Officially, it's been two years, but we've loved each other for a lot longer than that." He closes his eyes, thinking about all the time they missed trying to kill each other. Never again.

"And you really think he's the one?" Josh asks, his curiosity obvious.

"He is," is all Will says. Talking about Hannibal in this way is a flurry of emotion. On one hand, it is nice to be able to casually chat with someone about the man he loves without being condemned for it, exactly like anyone else, but on the other hand, he feels like he is talking behind Hannibal's back. "Hey, you should ask that guy that you like out. Just be careful and make sure it's safe, alright?" Josh nods in agreement, and his mouth spreads open in a grin.

"I think I will, thank you, Peter." He says it like he means it, and Will shakes his hand without hesitation this time. "Safe travels."

"To you as well." Will watches as Josh picks up his suitcase and walks across the terminal to a different gate, smiling to himself. He runs his finger across the edge of the paper in his pocket, opening his bag to look for the aforementioned sandwiches. He grins even wider when he finds that they are all made with paštetas.

Chapter End Notes

For anyone wondering if Josh is a secret agent or something, let me calm your nerves and say he is nothing of the kind. He's just a goofy kid that's nervous to ask his crush

out. It feels kind of weird calling him a kid since he's older than me, but he's younger than Will, and this is from his perspective.

Also, quick rant, but I'm really tired of AO3 underlining all of the medication names because the little red lines bother me. Alright, enough rambling. I'll try to post tomorrow, and if all goes according to plan, it will be the last chapter of this particular story.

Two Fires Burning in the Dark

Chapter Notes

Wow, I can't believe I'm finally saying this, but this is the last chapter of this specific work. I still have a lot to say, so there will likely be a sequel, but not for a while because I have exams, and I need to focus on those. I was spending pretty much every minute of my free time writing for the past two weeks, and I need a break, even if that break is studying for exams.

Sorry this chapter is late, I was in a lot of pain yesterday (I'm alright), so I couldn't focus on it.

Lastly, I wanted to say thank you so much for reading! The fact that this fic has an audience at all blows my mind and the amount of love and support I've been getting feels absolutely surreal. I truly cannot express my gratitude enough!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Will boards the plane, he has trouble finding his seat, so he asks the nearest flight attendant for help. She smiles at him, and says that he is in the wrong section.

"Your ticket is for first class, honey," she smiles, pointing him to the other side of the plane. He thanks her and heads to where she told him to go, wondering how Hannibal managed to switch the tickets he bought without him knowing. He supposes that this is what Hannibal was referring to when he said that the food was 'taken care of'.

What he is most grateful for, however, is the privacy. Talkative neighbors on planes ranks among his worst nightmares, so it is pleasant to have it not even be a possibility. He tries to sleep, but the quiet darkness evades him, and he resigns himself to gazing out the window, watching as the sheets of clouds go by. The ache in his chest keeps him company, an all-to-familiar friend from his stay at Johns Hopkins. It is a little ridiculous, he thinks, to be missing Hannibal so much after being apart for only a few hours, but being with Hannibal is akin to breathing. It is Will's natural state, so his absence throws off the circle of homeostasis within him. He wonders if the older man feels the same, but he suspects he knows the answer already.

The remainder of the flight passes slowly, as time often does when one wishes it would go faster. When the plane finally lands, he leaves as quickly as possible, thankful to be one the ground again. He is even more thankful for the British passport when he sees the long lines for non-EU countries. Belatedly, he realizes that he and Hannibal never agreed on where to meet. Not that it would help that much, given that he has never been to Berlin before. He stuffs his hands into his coat pockets, deciding to follow the crowd through the airport. Surely they will find each other somehow. The Louis Armstrong airport was very classic with the

lengthy columns and circular structures, but Berlin has a clean sleekness to it. The architecture is very modern. Large glass panels, exposed concrete walls, high ceilings. It lacks the stuffiness of the other airports he has visited.

His feet take him out of the secure area to baggage claim, which is unnecessary because neither of them packed checked bags as most of their personal belongings are either still in Italy or will be easier to simply purchase again. It makes traveling by train easier, and the remainder of their itinerary will be conquered almost entirely by train. He stops in his tracks, debating where he should go next since he obviously does not need to be here when something draws his eye. He lifts his gaze, searching for the flicker of movement, when he lands on another pair peering intensely at him. He would know those eyes anywhere, the familiar red glow setting his skin on fire. It takes him an insurmountable effort not to run to Hannibal, so he walks purposefully, fingernails digging into the flesh of his palms. Hannibal is wearing one of his grins that used to incense him, but now all he can do is return it and try not to pass out as he feels his heart thundering in his chest. The man looks exactly the same as he did less than twenty hours ago, and Will is shocked to think that they have been apart for less than a day. Hannibal opens his mouth to say something, but Will cuts him off by throwing himself at him. Hannibal falters for a second under his weight, but then he feels the familiar strength of his arms lifting him up and spinning him in a small arc. It is exhilarating, something he should have done as a teenager instead of in his late thirties, but Hannibal obviously does not care, which means he does not either. Letting go of his worries about what the world thinks of him has been one of the best developments in his new life. He feels solid ground beneath his feet once again, using the leverage to tuck himself closer against the older man. Will nuzzles into the crook of his shoulder and neck, and he sighs as Hannibal tangles his fingers into his hair.

"I have missed you too, mylimasis," he chuckles, tugging Will even tighter against him. They are so close that Will can feel their hearts beating against each other, perfectly synchronized.

"I got your letter, you know," he mumbles into Hannibal's coat. "You're a bastard for making me cry in public like that." Hannibal only continues the light stroking motion in his hair.

"That was not my intention, my love." Despite the platitudes, Will can tell that he is smiling into his hair. He knows that they should probably let go of each other, but it is also the last thing he actually wants to do. He lets Hannibal hold him, the senses of the outside world fading away around them.

"You're a liar, you know that right?" Will breathes. "Is it true that you actually want to grow old with me?" The idea of either of them growing old is somehow unimaginable. Old age is not a privilege he ever saw himself attaining, much less with Hannibal, but he would be remiss not to admit that he wants it now more than ever before.

"Yes, of course," says Hannibal, and Will can feel the light stiffening on his posture. "Do you not think that we will?" The concern is evident in his tone, making Will want nothing more than to soothe it away.
"I never saw myself living that long," he admits quietly. "With my track record and line of work, it was almost an inevitability to me."

"Oh, Will," murmurs Hannibal into his hair, curling his fingers down to cradle the nape of his neck. "I am not going to allow that to happen to you, ever. I promise." His voice drops lower, and Will is certain that no one would be able to hear them even if they tried. "When you first had your relapse of encephalitis, I went out on a walk, which is how I found you. I was reminiscing on all of the winters I had survived and all of the springs I had witnessed as a result. It was then that I decided that I never want to greet another spring without you." It is Will's turn to stiffen, and he pulls away slightly, shaking his head.

"What are you saying?"

"I am saying that your death would likely claim my life too. If not for yourself, I ask that you live for me."

"Anything, Hannibal."

Hannibal leads him out of baggage claim, and they take a shuttle to the train station. The station itself reminds Will a lot of the airport, modern, sleek, and a lot of glass. Having already been here for a few hours, Hannibal has already bought their tickets, so they board and find their compartment. It is an overnight trip through Poland, so the compartment contains pull-out beds and various sheets and blankets. As he did not sleep adequately on the plane, Will begins to make up the beds, throwing his travel bag on the floor and shucking his coat off. Early autumn in Berlin is not very cold, and he is wearing it mainly because it would not fit in his bag in the first place. In complete contrast to him, Hannibal is almost comically full of energy, busying himself by pacing around the cabin and moving various objects around the place. Will finishes his tidying of the sheets and stops the man in his tracks. He reaches out, taking Hannibal's forearms in his hands and tracing small circles over the exposed skin there.

“Are you alright?" he asks, brow furrowed in concern. Hannibal licks his lips in a gesture that Will almost wants to interpret as nervous, which is so unusual that he is beginning to worry. Hannibal is not one for such base human emotions. "Shhhh," he soothes, increasing the pressure slightly.

"I seem to be experiencing what I would describe as a bout of anxiety," Hannibal finally clarifies, swallowing profoundly at the thought.

"Okay," says Will. "You are a psychiatrist. What would you tell a patient to do?" The older man quirks an eyebrow at him in disapproval, but he answers the question.

"I would advise a patient to try to ground themselves, to list things that they can feel with their senses." The muscles of his forearm are tight under Will's fingers, and he can feel the tension radiating off of Hannibal in waves.

"Alright. In that case, what are a few things you can see?" Hannibal looks at him with clear contempt for the idea, but he persists. "Come on, the least you can do is take your own advice."

"Fine," he takes a shallow breath, and Will can feel him shaking beneath his grip. "I can see the fold out beds, the beige sheets you have dressed them with, and the metal buckle of the seatbelts on the chairs."

"Ok, good," continues Will. "What about the things you can hear?" Hannibal attempts to shift away, but Will holds him steady, refusing to let go.

"I can hear the chatter of the people milling about outside and the clanking of other trains on the tracks," he answers.

"That was only two. What else can you hear?" Will pushes insistently.

"I can hear your voice." The pique in his voice lifts a little, causing Will to soften his grip, but he continues the circular motions of his fingers.

"What can you smell?" Hannibal takes a deeper breath this time, nostrils flaring as he scents the air.

"Cigarettes mainly, but there is also the must of the chairs that likely have not been cleaned enough, and the scent that is so unmistakably you," there is no mistaking the fondness in his voice at the last sentence, and Will feels his heart beat ever so slightly faster.

"And what do I smell like?" he asks, genuine curiosity coloring his tone.

"So many questions, Will, how am I to answer them all?" Hannibal quips, his shoulders loosening by a fraction.

"Your smell is distinct, unique. It has an earthy heaviness to it, almost like gunpowder, but much cleaner. There is a freshness as well, not quite citrus, but something green, like lemon verbena. It is quite complicated, I am certain you would pose a considerable challenge to a perfumer."

"I'm going to take that as a compliment," Will retorts, knowing that Hannibal's compliments are often quite strange. "You did call me a mongoose once after all."

"That I did. You are quick and agile when you hunt, often underestimated, much like a mongoose." Will smiles as he hears the smugness return to Hannibal's face, fighting the urge to kiss him right then.

"All right, all right. What can you feel? As in physical touch," he adds, knowing that the older man would find and exploit any loophole he could.

"I feel the stale air on my face, the ground beneath my feet, and your hands on my skin," he says, looking down at Will's fingers still digging into the skin of his arms. Will immediately lets go and brings his hands to his sides, embarrassed that he allowed himself to lose track in this way. The flickers of his original fear of hurting Hannibal do not haunt him as they once

did, but they never quite leave completely. Hannibal frowns, taking Will's hands in his. "Will," he murmurs. "I like it when you touch me," and then adds, almost bashfully, "please don't stop."

"I was hurting you," Will spits out, trying to turn away, but Hannibal only tightens his grip on his hands.

"I assure you, you were not," he states. "If it is of any comfort, I would have told you if you were."

"Would you really have?" Wills asks, his voice full of doubt. "You barely admitted you are feeling anxious just now."

"That is a different circumstance entirely," Hannibal retorts. "I will put it this way. I know that hurting me would devastate you, and the last thing I wish is to see you in despair, so trust me when I say that I would have told you." He turns Will's hand around in his, stroking over his wrist bones. "Your wellbeing is more important to me than my pride." Will merely nods his head, dipping his chin so that he is staring at Hannibal's chest instead of into his eyes.

"Last thing," he says, remembering that they never finished the grounding activity. "What can you taste?" The man before him rolls his eyes, but this time the action is playful in nature, and he squeezes his hands tighter.

"I always thought the one about taste was rather pointless," he explains. "Unless the patient is eating, which they would not be in any standard clinical setting, they will likely not be tasting anything. Asking them to describe the taste inside their mouth is often futile on its own and if anything adds to the patient's feelings of anxiety."

"That just sounds like an excuse to me, doctor," Will chides. "How about describing what you can taste now." Feeling more audacious than usual, he leans forward and tilts his head up to meet Hannibal's mouth with his. He pauses just as their lips brush together, silently asking permission. Hannibal's breath catches, and then he finds the pressure being returned. Their teeth click as he lets Hannibal taste him properly, having initiated this kiss for that specific reason. It has been almost a week since they have kissed in this way, so when Hannibal runs his tongue under his teeth he shudders into it, snaking his hands into his hair and pulling gently. He feels utterly surrounded by it, the heat of the other man completely consuming him. It is so much, so much but not enough all at once. Will slants his mouth, deepening the kiss before parting to come up for air. They are both breathing heavily, throats bobbing in tandem as they gulp the air. The steady hum of the moving train reverberates through him, adding to the already electrified feeling of his skin. Hannibal leans in again, this time gently pressing his lips to the tender skin behind his ear. Will sighs, tilting his head to nuzzle into the crook of his neck.

"Is it true that pressure helps decrease anxiety?" Will asks, seemingly out of the blue. He can tell that the question startles Hannibal through the slightest pause in his answer.

"Yes, deep touch pressure is found to stimulate the parasympathetic nervous system, resulting in a feeling of calm and contentment. Why?" he asks, making Will smile.

"Go lay down on the bed," he prompts, waiting for Hannibal to comply.

"Will, I assure you, I am alright now," Hannibal protests, which does nothing to dishearten him.

"Do you want me to lay on you or not?" When the older man hesitates momentarily he takes the opportunity to speak and adds, "I thought so. Now go." Hannibal obediently spreads himself out on the lower bunk, neatly placing his shoes on the floor. Will follows behind shortly after, grinning at the look of disapproval when he haphazardly kicks his shoes off. The bunk is definitely small for two people, but they will manage somehow, and his plans do not involve much space between them either way. He jumps onto the bed, supporting his weight with his knees and arms. Gently lowering himself on top of Hannibal, he tries to be as careful as possible. Hannibal makes a disapproving sound.

"You are not going to hurt me, my love," he whispers. "Please." The last word is what breaks Will's resolve, and he allows Hannibal to support his full weight. Being a few inches shorter than Hannibal, Will tucks his head under his chin, allowing their fingers to intertwine. It is now that he realizes how tired he is, eyelids threatening to close of their own accord, but he fights the urge.
"How is pressure therapy working out for you?" Will asks, squeezing his hand even tighter.

"I would not refer to this type of therapy as orthodox in any way, but then again you are not licensed, so I suppose I cannot complain," he chuckles, and the sound is sweeter than any bird's call he has ever heard. Hannibal reaches up to ruffle his hair, pressing a kiss to his temple. "Sleep, mylimasis. I can see that you have tired yourself out endlessly today." Will agrees that sleep sounds really inviting right now, so he tucks himself closer to the man and allows his eyelids to finally fall.

Will wakes up to find the outside world dark with only the emergency lights on the floor giving off any light. He is still lying on top of Hannibal, one arm tucked under his shoulder and the other around his waist. He lifts his head to find Hannibal peering at him from under his eyelashes, eyes glinting with the little moonlight pouring into the compartment. He begins to trail his thumb over the divot between Will's shoulder blades, causing Will to shiver.

"You always touch me so gingerly," Will says, yawning the sleep away from his voice. He is getting sore from craning his neck at this angle, so he shifts the arm under Hannibal's shoulder to prop himself up with it instead. "Even that night when you almost stabbed me. I thought then that I would let you do anything to me as long as you held me like that." Hannibal remains silent, continuing the light movement of his thumb. He traces the edge of Will's scapula, as if wanting to commit every detail to memory, like an artist admiring his muse.

"I have not slept," he quietly divulges, and Will furrows his brow.

"You should have woken me up and told me to move, and don't get started with that 'but you need your sleep' because you need your sleep too, Hannibal," he says, his tone admonishing. "Don't tell me I was bothering you with my bony frame." He says it like a joke, but he means the words. He does not see why Hannibal should trade sleep for his comfort.

"No, Will, it is not that." He is lying so still, the only movement being the steady rise and fall of his chest. Sometimes the man appears to not even need to blink.

"Then what is it? Tell me, please," Will encourages. Hannibal's hand halts its wandering, moving instead to cup Will's face and smooth over his cheek.

"In the event that I die–" He can barely utter the last word before Will cuts him off.

"Don't say that. You're not going to die," he insists, turning his face away from Hannibal's touch, but the older man holds him in place.

"Will, let me speak, please." Will allows him to maneuver his face, but he refuses to meet his eyes. "In the event of my death, I want you to know that you will be taken care of. I had already arranged it before we left for Italy the first time, before I attempted to stab you. Everything I have, I left to you."

"Hannibal. . ."

"Will."

"I just don't want to imagine it." Will shakes his head. "The prospect of a world without you is. . ." he trails off, unable to articulate how he feels with only words alone. "I don't want to think about it."

"So you know how I feel when you mention how you do not think you will live to see old age," Hannibal points out, and Will winces at the realization that he is being a little hypocritical. "I do not intend to cause you distress, Will, but you are my family, and we help our families if we can."

"You consider me your family?" Will whispers, voice breaking as he tries and fails to stifle a sob.

"What else would I consider you? We are getting married are we not?" Hannibal's tone is so sincere, and his eyes are so full of love that it is too much for Will. He stoops his head down, nesting against Hannibal's chest. Hannibal only holds him closer, practically smothering him in his arms, but he welcomes the feeling of being held so dearly.

They lay entangled together for a long time, listening to the sounds of their breaths mingling and the low rumble of the train. The shadows cast by the moon seem to elongate. They dance over the hollows inside the compartment, making everything appear harsher and more severe. Will watches the landscape go by, fields of crops and dense forests alternating as they move further and further East. He opens his mouth to speak, and his voice is so quiet that Hannibal has to strain his ears to hear him.

"I want your last name, Hannibal," he murmurs into the stiff planes of Hannibal's chest. "If we are family, then I want your name, even if legally I cannot change it." The man beneath him shifts almost imperceptibly, but Will can tell that he is taken aback.

"You wish to hyphenate?" he asks, caution in his voice.

"No. When we were back in New Orleans, you called my father 'Mr. Graham'. I did not think twice about it until I realized that I am technically also 'Mr. Graham,'" he pauses, swallowing carefully. "Hearing it then, it did not feel like my name. It isn't who I am, not anymore. I want your name. As long as you don't mind, that is."

"Of course I do not mind. I merely did not predict this outcome. You never fail to surprise me, Will, and I love you all the more for it." Hannibal kisses the crown of his head, and the gesture is so tender and full of reverence that Will melts completely. "William Lecter," he says, testing the name out and smiling softly. Will cannot help but grin at the sound of it.

"Just Will is fine," he explains. "My father was the only one that ever called me William."

"Yes, of course. Will Lecter then."

"You know I can practically feel how smug you are. It's not nearly as endearing as you think it is," Will jests playfully. Hannibal feigns indignation, tilting his head away in mock irritation.

"I assure you that you would also be smug if the man you love returns your affections to the extent that he wants to marry you and even take your name," he elucidates, "especially considering the same man initially wanted to kill you." The tone is joking, and Will knows that Hannibal is not hung up on the events of the past, but the words touch him regardless.

"Does it really mean that much to you?" he asks, almost incredulous.

"Yes, mylimasis. It means more than I can tell you, more than I have words to describe." His eyes are shining now, more so than normal. Will can almost make out the faint trace of wetness lining his lash line, pooling in the roots.
Will leans over to press a chaste kiss to his lips, lingering for a moment before curling around Hannibal's side a second time.

"Sleep now," he whispers, running his fingers over the side of Hannibal's face. The older man closes his eyes, tucking Will even tighter against him, and they drift off together, neither of them alone in the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

I’m not crying, you’re crying

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